

# The Binding of Men:

## Masculinity and Manhood in Harvey Swados' *On the Line*

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**Harvey Swados, 1959**

*New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection (Library of Congress) LC-USZ62-117697*

# Abstract

This dissertation discusses the concepts of masculinity and fatherhood in a 1957 short story collection by Harvey Swados. Through a close reading of all eight stories in *On the Line*, I want to focus on how the development of the characters and the trials they face are inseparably connected to the societal concepts of fatherhood and masculinity in the early to mid-twentieth century. I will argue that Swados presents, not simply as Nelson Lichtenstein has asserted, a criticism of the working class's conditions and the factory as dehumanizing, nor merely a criticism of capitalist society as argued by Neil D. Isaacs, but rather that *On the Line* can be read as a criticism of the gender normative stereotypes that men (and by extension women) were restricted by in the author's contemporary America.

This analysis attempts to place Swados' collection in a larger context of gender theory. The masculinities theories of Michael S. Kimmel, Jørgen Lorentzen, and R. W. Connell will be central to the discussion, as well as E. Anthony Rotundo's treatise on the history of manhood in America. The characters in Swados' collection experience uncertainty, self delusion, and marginalization, as their personal dreams, desires, and confidences are ground down by the factory. My view, presented in this dissertation, is that a deeper understanding of Swados' presentation of the factory work place unearths an underlying critique of the importance of empathy, emotion, and solidarity that men have been, and to some extent are, unable to come to terms with, because of gender stereotypes.



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

In the first quarter century after World War II, jobs were plentiful living standards rising, and if labor seemed increasingly routine, then automation promised to shrink the workweek; and, perhaps more important, the bounty of postwar American society – new cars, suburban houses, TV sets and dishwashers – seemed compensation enough for the dullness of postwar factory and office.

(Lichtenstein vii-viii)

There will always be people who disagree with the sentiment, regardless of their social, economic, or academic achievements, that men are privileged, and that misogyny is rampant in today's society. This, sometimes vehement, disagreement often originates from a person's inability to distinguish between themselves as an individual, and themselves as a member of a social group, that is, or is not, the victim of some sort of oppression. In addition, the layman term "privilege" implies a possession, or a currency to be spent, or almost like a basket of cookies you can eat or trade. The feminist use of privilege, however, is confusing, because while the image associated with the colloquial use could be a Scrooge McDuck-style "money bin" of advantages, the feminist concept is closer to being without societal oppression. The greater the privilege, the fewer limitations put on the individual. How can you convince a twenty-something, white, heterosexual, middle-class liberal male that his, to himself, a-masculine, sexually deprived, perhaps excessively video gaming, lonely existence is *privileged*? Shouldn't he, then, if he is so privileged, by all accounts, be happier?

With the birth of, and proliferation of access to, the Internet during the last twenty years, the above question seems to be a sentiment that is often repeated in various on-line communities, both by budding male feminists seeking enlightenment, and by stringent anti-feminist, the so called "angry white males" (Kimmel 197). These angry men and their female

allies ardently assault feminism, blaming the continued liberation of women by “feminiazis”<sup>1</sup> to be the culprit(s) responsible for the contemporary crisis in masculinity (Kimmel 197). For some men, in their subjective spheres, this anger is righteous. They likely ask themselves something akin to “How can I be a man, when so much is taken away from me?” The question “How can I be a man?” or its more philosophical sibling “What does it *mean* to be a man?” has undoubtedly, in some form, challenged the minds of individuals, both great and insignificant, for centuries. However the birth of feminism as a collection of movements, branching into its theories and various subcategories, provoked the question on a grander scale; masculinities theorist Michael Kimmel quotes Aldous Huxley from Huxley’s 1932 *Texts and Pretexts*, pondering “what is our ideal man? On what grand and luminous mythological figure does contemporary humanity attempt to model itself? The question is embarrassing. Nobody knows” (Kimmel 1). Especially during the last decades, the effort and pioneering of feminist scholars have made us more aware of the importance of gender in the shaping of both individual and society. Gender in this context is understood to be “the sets of cultural meanings and prescriptions that each culture attaches to one’s biological sex” (Kimmel 3). The implications of feminism, perhaps most widely known as advocated by Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that women are “the second sex,” also carried with it an important sentiment regarding the dichotomy between the genders. The women’s movement served to highlight and bring gender into the public, but as Kimmel proposes, mainly for women. Academic courses on gender are “populated largely by women, as if the term only applied to them” (3). It is somewhat understandable, then, that unhappy and marginalized men become envious of the attention that is bestowed upon women as a collective of gender. If women are something other, and unique, whose gender and identity are culturally, socially, and academically important, what value is there in being the universally generic white middle-class male?

This question, and the various other related questions (most importantly “What does it mean to be a man?”), is what has become the central point of the last two decades’ development in male gender theory, namely the collection of movements known as “masculinities.” It is with basis in this relatively new paradigm that I will apply recent masculinities theories as literary criticism of the male role in Harvey Swados’ 1957 short

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Feminazi” is a portmanteau of the two nouns feminist and Nazi. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it as “usually disparaging: an extreme or militant feminist,” and the term has been popularized through its use by rightwing radio host Rush Limbaugh (Media Matters).

story composite *On the Line*. Beauvoir asserted in *The Second Sex* (1953) that “[a] man would never get the notion of writing a book on the peculiar situation of the human male” (Kimmel 1). I am aware that a comparison between the personal lives of Simone de Beauvoir and Harvey Swados, for the sake of this argument, will be impossible, irrelevant, and unfruitful for any academic discourse. I am also aware that *On the Line* is not, nor is it intended to be, a theoretical or philosophical treatise equivalent to *The Second Sex*, and I do not seek to diminish Beauvoir’s importance, nor influence, as her work has been criticized by far greater minds than my own. However I will argue that Beauvoir’s assertion only four years prior to Swados’ publication is decidedly untrue. This thesis will argue the importance of Harvey Swados’ short story composite *On the Line* (1957) as a presentation of various heteronormative gender problems that men face, not only in the author’s contemporary 1957 American society, but also today. This thesis will argue that *On the Line* can be seen as an important contributor to understanding men’s problems, as it demonstrates a male view of heteronormative gender problems, men’s oppression of other men through unconscious support for patriarchal standards of oppression, and the effects of homosocial alienation and lack of empathy, all of which can mark Swados as a pioneering masculinities author. The following will argue that *On the Line* is not, as proposed by Nelson Lichtenstein, merely a work on the challenges and dehumanization of the 1950’s modern factory worker, but rather a presentation of oppressive and limiting societal features imposed on the individual male, and subsequently, the results of them. This thesis will also argue the importance of recognizing Swados, as his poignant display of the significance of male on male homosocial alienation as a result of men’s collective support for a patriarchy they do not benefit from is as relevant today as it was in 1957. Through close reading of *On the Line*, the following analyses will unearth the composite’s criticism of patriarchal standards and principles that resemble our contemporary turn of the millennium masculinities theories, promoting Swados as a pro-feminist, masculinities-centered author.

Harvey Swados was born in 1920 into an upper middle-class Jewish family. His father was a physician and his mother painted. Swados turned communist in high school, and being an anti-Stalinist radical, he supported the Worker’s party but distanced himself from the Soviet Union as any model for society. He later became a supportive member of the Trotskyist movement, and together with his fellow activists “put [his] faith in a militant, international working class that would stand [...] opposed to the ruling classes both in capitalist and communist regimes” (Lichtenstein xi). He saw Communism as oppressive,

seeking to subordinate the working classes' aspirations and the working class' striving for democracy in the workplace in favor of "the foreign policy interests of one of the big powers" (Lichtenstein xi). Swados' support for the political left was described in 1988 by Alan M. Wald as "intransigent, independent", and Swados himself as "immune to complacency and downright angry with social inequality" (Rideout 493). These views stayed with Swados until his death in 1972, prompting him to support the struggles of "blacks and students in the 1960s" (Lichtenstein xii). After his death, Hilton Kramer praised Swados at a memorial service dedicated to the author for being the embodiment of a famous Anton Chekhov passage that Swados himself enjoyed: "There ought to be, behind the door of every happy man, contended man, someone standing with a hammer, continuously reminding him with a tap that there are unhappy people" (qtd. in Kramer, 226).

Passing through a brief first marriage, Swados started factory work at the age of twenty at Bell Aircraft, before he moved to New York to work for Brewster Aviation in Long Island City near Manhattan (Lichtenstein x). Escaping the "boredom" of the factory he joined the merchant marine in 1943, but returned to New York in 1946 for his second marriage (Lichtenstein xii). Between 1947 and 1955, Swados attempted to make a living as a writer, publishing short stories as well as a well-received 1955 novel *Out Went the Candle*. Returning to factory work in 1956 he applied to the newly constructed Ford Motor Company factory at Mahwah in New Jersey. When he applied the "personnel man was glad to see that he had some blue-collar work experience" and he was assigned to work as a metal finisher (Lichtenstein xiii-xiv). While working at the FMC, he started writing the collection of short stories that came to be published as *On the Line* (1957). He framed it around the metal finishing line and his experiences with the men he worked with, stating that "[e]verything has fallen into place [...] [m]y earlier factory years have meaning now that they didn't before, and I think now I really know the pity and vanity of American life from the inside" (Lichtenstein xv). At the time, the success of the unions had, according to Nelson Lichtenstein, reduced class division in postwar American society to "virtual irrelevance", and trade union leader Philip Murray claimed that "[...] the interest of farmers, factory hands, business and professional people, and white collar toilers [had been proven] to be the same" (qtd. in Lichtenstein xvi). Prompted by his return to the factory in 1956 and the publication of *On the Line* the following year, Swados took the opportunity to discuss the worker's relation to the middle class in his essay "The Myth of the Happy Worker", also published in 1957. In the essay Swados explains that "if the worker earns like the middle-class, votes like the middle-

class, dresses like the middle-class, dreams like the middle-class, he ceases to exist as a worker.” More importantly, despite the “bounty of postwar American society”, Swados also argues that “there is one thing that the worker doesn’t do like the middle-class: he works like a worker” (“The Myth” 237).

Swados himself commented on his collection in a 1961 interview with Herbert Feinstein, arguing to that his wish for American literature going into the Sixties, would be that skilled and serious writers would “dare” to “recapture” what he considered to be a “lost domain” in literature. Swados was concerned that the writers of the 1950s had given up the themes of success, materialism, and passion to the crude treatment of what he called “hack writers” (Feinstein 85). Believing that if the novel was to re-enter mainstream, it would have to concern itself with grander ideas than marginal stories about people who are crippled psychologically, mentally, or physically, and, subsequently reconsider what is “vital in American life” (Feinstein 86). Swados explained that this is what he attempted to do with *On the Line*, and that he, during the writing of the collection, was writing about a topic nobody had treated with any dignity since the 1930s: the proletariat (Feinstein 86). This affection Swados had for the “ordinary life experienced by millions of American people” was also praised by Irving Howe, who applauded *On the Line* as possessing a “quality no one would have thought possible in a book about factory life” (641-42).

The citation at the head of this chapter, from the opening page of the 1990 introduction to Harvey Swados’ short story composite *On the Line*, encompasses in many ways the perceptions that Swados appears to have set out to prove false with his collection. Presenting the viewpoint explicitly elaborated in “The Myth of the Happy Worker” (“there is one thing that the worker doesn’t do like the middle-class: he works like a worker”) as a theme, Swados fictionalizes the everyday workplace experiences of the metal finisher in eight short vignettes, showcasing “a disparate group of men working [...] [at] a 1950’s automobile assembly plant” (O’Connor 260). He explores, and presents, the reasons why these men came to work at the plant, the dreams they seek to fulfill, and the horror they experience as the meaningless work “dashed their hopes and crushed their spirits (O’Connor 260). In *On the Line* the reader is introduced to LeRoy, the black singer who dreams of auditioning for the Metropolitan Opera (“The Day the Singer Fell”); Kevin, the Irish immigrant and his childlike wonder and astonishment at the American way of life (“Fawn, With a Bit of Green”); Walter, who works to save money to go to college (“Joe, the Vanishing American”); Pop, the trusted old-timer

who lost his wife to cancer (“A Present for the Boy”); Orrin, the hard worker who enjoys the physical challenge of factory work (“On the Line”); Harold, who struggles to stay on the wagon (“One for the Road”); Buster, the foreman, who is stuck between the workers below and the managers above him (“Just One of the Boys”); and Frank, who is ashamed to go back to blue-collar work after failed business ventures (“Back in the Saddle Again”).

Although the eight stories differ from each other in various ways, the short stories also present, in abundance, the themes and ideas of autonomy, work, manhood, and potency, and accompanying criticism(s) of patriarchal standards that put each man at the mercy of these ideas. These aspects can be identified in all of the short stories of the composite, but some elements stand out more in some stories. As we close read *On the Line*, even though we focus on the gender issues presented in the short stories, it may be prudent to keep the citation from “The Myth of the Happy Worker” (“there is one thing that the worker doesn’t do like the middle-class: he works like a worker”) in mind, because of its obvious relation to the superficial topic that Swados presents in the collection. It is also important to consider the order of presentation of the individual short stories in *On the Line*. While it is entirely possible to divulge meaning from, and thoroughly enjoy, each story in isolation, their relation to each other can unearth meaning(s) that are greater than the sum of their parts. The close reading of each story will touch on some relevant structural characteristics as they pertain to the theme Swados presents, however the focus will remain on the thematic aspects of the presentation of the characters; the dramatic events portrayed in relation to the themes of manhood, gender stereotypes, and social alienation.

Harvey Swados started his writer’s career with a short story titled “The Amateurs,” which was published in *Contemporary*, the University of Michigan’s literary quarterly. The story written by sixteen year old Swados was reprinted in *The Best Short Stories of 1938*, where it enjoyed the company of stories by prolific writers such as Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, and John Steinbeck (Isaacs). In his early career, he worked as a book reviewer, and while studying at the University of Michigan wrote regular columns for student newspapers, reviewing books, movies, and other types of entertainment. Swados also wrote forewords for books, plays, and screenplays. The Swados archive at the W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts spans nearly twenty three linear feet and contains bibliographies, journals, reviews, novels, and short stories written by the author from his active years from 1945 to 1972. The collection also includes sketches and material written to



the author in memoriam, as well as brief autobiographies. Swados is also described as being a superior journalist, who “filled assignments ranging from an interview with Julia Child in France to traveling to Biafra for the Committee for Biafran Artists and Writers” (Andrew W. Mellon Foundation). His first novel *Out Went the Candle* (1955) was described as a “study of modern America, treating an opportunistic self-made businessman who alienates his children by trying to mold them” (Hart). Two years later, after being forced to return to factory work, Swados published *On the Line* (1957). In the following years, all up to his death in 1972, Swados wrote five novels, two of which were published posthumously: *False Coin* (1959) dealt with “the problem of the artist trying to preserve integrity in a commercial society”; *The Will* (1963) is about “three very different brothers trying to get their own way as they struggle over an inheritance”; *Standing Fast* (1970), which recounts “the experiences of a small group of dedicated Marxists”; and *Celebration* (1975), depicting “the relationship of a 90-year old progressive educator and his radical grandson.” (Hart). *The Unknown Constellations* (1995) was rediscovered as Swados’ first, but unpublished, novel by Neil D. Isaacs in 1989, as he stumbled upon an “introduction by Robin Swados that mentioned his father’s unpublished novel” (Isaacs). Isaacs refers to Bette Swados as remembering “her husband writing the novel [...] the year they married” which dates the script to 1946 (Source? xiii). In addition to *On the Line*, he published two other short story collections, namely *Nights in the Gardens of Brooklyn* (1960) and *A Story for Teddy and Others* (1965). *Nights in the Gardens of Brooklyn: The Collected Short Stories of Harvey Swados* was published in 1986 with an introduction by Robin Swados, Harvey’s youngest son.

It is clear that many of Swados’ works center on unfair treatment or marginalized existences. Charles Shapiro has stated: “[k]eely aware of the social realities of today, Swados, as a splendid and imaginative creative artist is well equipped to transform these realities into fiction, a fiction that will give the lie to all who so patronizingly announce that the novel of social criticism is dying” (192). *On the Line* itself has been subject to literary criticism, for example by Hilton Kramer, that boldly states that the collection “has more to tell us about worker discontent—about the actual experience and aspirations of the factory class in America—than all the studies amassed by the Government bureaus and foundation research committees will ever equal” (Kramer)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Kramer, Hilton, *New York Times Book Review*. See blurb, Swados, Harvey. *On the Line*. 1957. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990

The collection has also been described as “confusing”, and has even been considered a novel rather than a collection, after the model of *Winesburg Ohio*. The 1960 Bantam edition of *On the Line* even used the word “novel” on the front cover (Isaacs xxv). Just as Lichtenstein described *On the Line* as a “humane and sympathetic portrait of the psychological and social brutality inherent in mid-century factory work [that] injected a moral urgency into the understanding of manual labor at [the] time” (Lichtenstein xi), Isaacs also focuses on the “drudgery of assembly-line work that produces a deadening of the spirit,” but adds that “[c]apitalism is seen not only as a rigid enforcer of a class system but as a destroyer of individual aspirations and artistic expression” (Isaacs xxv).

It is this viewpoint, that *On the Line* presents a short story collection that critiques and presents class system(s) as a destroyer of individual aspirations (as well as, in the case of LeRoy in “The Day the Singer Fell”, artistic expression), that becomes the basis for the gendered reading and criticism of this dissertation. In order to appreciate the gender issues Swados presents, it is vital to have an understanding not only of the historical masculinity of Swados contemporary mid-twentieth century America, but also of later gender theories. The following chapter will present some gender theory as well as relevant historical stereotype of “manhood,” “masculinity,” and “fatherhood.” The third chapter of this dissertation will attempt to provide some insight into structural theory and genre characteristics that allow a deeper understanding of the social critiques Swados presents in *On the Line*. The fourth chapter will discuss the eight short stories of *On the Line* in the same order as they are presented in the collection.

## Chapter 2: Gender Theory

[W]e need woman's suffrage to protect us and our government from our own one-sided masculine view of life. This is not to say that our man's views are wrong or that the woman's views are right. We mean only that each view is partial and inadequate, and needs the other to balance and complete it.

(Ellis 256)

Under patriarchy, men's relationships with other men cannot help but be shaped and patterned by patriarchal norms, though they are less obvious than the norms governing male-female relationships. A society could not have the kinds of power dynamics that exist between women and men in our society without certain kinds of systematic power dynamics operating among men as well.

(Pleck 416-417)

### **Gender Theory and its relation to *On the Line***

In order to appreciate the gender issues presented explicitly and implicitly in Harvey Swados' *On the Line*, it is important to be aware of various feminist theories, masculinities theories, as well as the history of masculinity, and the concept of "manhood". It is critical to be aware of the impact feminism and the feminist movements have had on the deconstruction of the gender binary, which in effect brought masculinity out into the open, and dispelled the veil of invisibility men were operating under as the agents of, and victims of, gender-normativity. Misogyny birthed feminism, which in turn birthed masculinities. The importance of feminism in relation to *On the Line* is the historical context, as the book was published prior to both the formation of the National Association for Women, and the women's movements of the 1970s.

It is crucial to be aware of the concept of masculinities in order to be appreciative of the amount of gender fear and oppressive patriarchal problems Swados presents. While it is entirely fruitful to consider the book in light of its explicit and overtly apparent criticism of the working place, and specifically the factory, as a source of discomfort and oppression of

the men portrayed in the collection, knowledge of the ways in which men may be victims of the gender arrangements in their respective societies could lead to a deeper understanding of the work. The field of masculinities also grants the reader insight into specifically non-misogynistic ways of appreciating the characters in the book and their hardships. It allows us to accurately classify their particular forms of suffering as a result that stems not only from the dehumanizing aspects of the factory work, but from the way the protagonists are subject to patriarchal gender policing and gender stereotypes that promote homosocial alienation and humiliation. Finally, it is crucial for the present day reader to be acquainted with some of the historical twists, turns, and concepts men in general faced in the years prior to the publication of *On the Line*. As argued below, the relevant historical period for defining the types of masculinity Swados showcases spans from the latter parts of the nineteenth century through to the First and Second World War. Rotundo argues that the concepts of manhood and masculinity taught to young boys by their fathers tend to command their lives as adults, and that the dominating notion(s) of masculinity stayed the same throughout the majority of the twentieth century, up until the 1980s (Rotundo 264, 294).

John Gerlach states that the novel “customarily announced its theme clearly”, and has the privilege of advancing and developing it “symphonically” through repetition, contrast, reassembly and construction, while the short story merely shows it (12). The emergence of a theme, argued to be, in some cases, a signal of closure, can be multifaceted in composition (Gerlach 12). The aim of this close reading of *On the Line* is to uncover the inner workings of the story and the relations the characters have to the themes of work, potency, social stability, and how patriarchy permeates the social structure of the collection.

The protagonists’ perception of his potency, in combination with the condition of the environment surrounding him, and his position within the social setting, come together to form the characters’ sense of autonomy. By autonomy in this setting, I mean degree of potential, or lack thereof, for fulfilling a chosen goal or attaining a sought after mental state (e.g. satisfaction, overcoming fear, insecurity etcetera). In short, autonomy represents the characters’ chances for attaining their dreams and desires.

In the case of the various characters in *On the Line*, this autonomy is closely linked to the understanding of “manhood,” as discussed in Michael S. Kimmel’s *Manhood in America*, E. Anthony Rotundo’s *American Manhood*, Jørgen Lorentzen’s *Maskulinitet*, and elsewhere.

In the 2006 second edition of *Manhood in America*, Kimmel describes the American perception of ideal “manhood” from the birth of the Self-Made Man after the American Revolution, to what he calls the contemporary “crisis” of masculinity (vii-viii). While book admittedly focuses topically on “the history of middle-class white American masculinity”, it also traces the history of the “Heroic Artisan”, also known as the worker’s ideal (xi). As argued by Swados in “The Myth of the Happy Worker”, as well as trade union leader Philip Murray in the late 1940s, the working class of the mid-twentieth century was closer to the middle-class than ever before, both politically, income-wise, as well as in dreams and aspirations. The working class’ cultural adjacency to the middle-class was further enhanced with the introduction of, and proliferation of, moving picture media industry, and it therefore makes logical sense to assume that the mid 1950s ideal state of “manhood” to be valid, in a general sense, for both middle-and working class men.<sup>3</sup> Where *Manhood in America*, presents the masculine ideal that men tried to live up to, rather than what men actually *did*, E. Anthony Rotundo’s *American Manhood* presents a more practical day-to-day recount of the transformation of masculinity from the American Revolution and into the Modern Era. Rotundo states, in his preface, that he was “eager to study men as people, not public actors; to learn about men out of the historical spotlight as well as in it; to understand men as men, as one sex in contrast to the other” (ix). Admittedly, his starting point is “white, middle-class, Yankee Northerners”, but he argues that this is where the greatest source material lies, as well as the targeted group being the most influential in nineteenth century society (Rotundo ix).

The historical range presented in *Manhood in America* and *American Manhood* is of immense value as a greater historical presentation of manhood, but it seems prudent to focus on the perception of masculinity and manhood in the period(s) related to both the characters in *On the Line* and its author. The characters in the collection range from their late teens (Walter in “Joe, the Vanishing American”), to their mid to late fifties (Frank in “Back in the Saddle Again”). The relevant historical period for these characters therefore ranges from the turn of the century and pre-war years of the first decade up until the post-war mid-1950s.

### **Relevant Historical Background of Masculinity**

The turn of the last century American men had faced both economic and social limitations, as they struggled to prove themselves. They had fought to preserve their

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<sup>3</sup> Kimmel concerns himself primarily with white male masculine ideals, but as argued below, the African American protagonist of “The Day the Singer Fell” adapts himself to this paradigm in various ways.

workplaces as “sites of self-making”, and toiled relentlessly to discipline their bodies and prove that mental strength could harness, and cultivate, physical strength (Kimmel 124). They also struggled to prevent feminization of the coming generation of men, as they sought to instill masculine values in their sons. In addition to advocating the physical strength and fatherly responsibility for the fate of male offspring, they “created parallel institutions of nurture and solace for themselves, and occasionally escaped to a more pristine earlier world where men were men, and women virtually nonexistent” (Kimmel 124). These men argued that victory, and the inevitable growth of peacetime economy, was a reward that the victorious warrior had earned for himself. This optimism, however, was soon replaced by the Great Depression and the “widespread unemployment” of the 1930s (Kimmel 124-127).

Contemporary literature portrayed the end of the “Roaring Twenties” and the following decade as a time of bleak prospects, increasing unemployment, and a rise in poverty and divorce rates. Some social scientists declared that the decade saw a “dramatic attenuation of social mobility” as technicians and managers benefited economically at the expense of the ordinary worker. This is exemplified by Swados through his character Frank’s interactions with the younger generation at the factory (211-212). Others saw the traditional image of the Heroic Artisan tarnished by its implied association with bolshevism (Kimmel 128). As the depression of the 1930s took its toll on the economy, the workplace ceased to be a reliable arena for demonstrating manhood. With nearly twenty five percent of the workforce unemployed, men sought elsewhere for justification of their masculinity. As earlier, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, racial exclusion and anti-immigrant sentiments became an outlet for this tension, depicting non-white American males as “less manly” with the implication that this would make “us” “manlier”. The decade also saw the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, argued as an outlet for the combined forces of “insufferable boredom” at, and the general lack of, workplaces (Kimmel 128-130). Others felt that they lost the safe havens they once had, and the newer generation felt robbed of the chance to participate in the homosocial sphere of the “gentleman’s club”, as businesses seized these male only retreats.

As “modern man” lost his pastoral escape from the suffocating effects of civilization, he also, according to Sherwood Anderson, became “impotent before the machine which dominates industrial production”, as the machine is “too complex and beautiful [...] [and] [m]y manhood cannot stand up against them yet. They do things too well. They do too much” (qtd. in Kimmel 132). The result was a decade of emasculation, as many lost their jobs, and

therefore their status, both to themselves, and to their wives; they came to view themselves as “impotent patriarchs” (Kimmel 132). As the unemployed man was forced to return home in humiliation, he did so in the hope that “by raising their sons to be successful men they could themselves achieve some masculine redemption (Kimmel 133). This hope also included fear, as parents were convinced that “effeminacy in young boys was a certain predictor of adult male homosexuality” (Kimmel 135). The concept of the “impotent patriarch” of the prewar era, who defined his manhood as a breadwinner and employee, should be kept in mind as we close read *On the Line* and come to appreciate the “impotence” of Swados’ employed patriarchs.

The 1920s and 1930s gave birth to new fears of gay men; where homosexuality had, at earlier times, been the focus of ridicule, the argument had been that the “effeminate fairy” was an object there was no reason to fear (Kimmel 135). The focus on male influence and on family life lead, naturally, to reactions from various forms of media, exemplified by the creation of comic strips such as *Blondie*, that showcased the male patriarch in the form of Dagwood Bumstead; Dagwood is not a *bad* man, but by all standards of the time, he was a *bad man* (Kimmel 136). The 1930s also saw the birth of the superhero as escapism; mild-mannered and bespectacled Clark Kent transformed into the “most courageous, heroic, manly man who had ever lived”, offering to American men who were at the mercy of their self-perceived lack of masculinity the promise that “the heart of a hero” could still be theirs (Kimmel 140).

The proliferation of moving picture media became an outlet for critique of, and stereotype of, contemporary American manhood. Films often portrayed masculine loneliness and failure, as in William Well’s *Heroes for Sale* (1934), where a “World War I veteran returns to home and tries to rebuild his life, but is forced to sell his Congressional Medal of Honor to a pawnbroker who already has a case full of pawned medals” (Kimmel 127). Other films, such as Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936), portrayed the modern factory as a site of “humiliation and alienation” (Kimmel 144). The American man of the antebellum First World War era tried to find a place in the home, “both literally and symbolically” as he struggled to identify with a workplace that could no longer be relied on to prove his role as breadwinner” (Kimmel 145).

Continuing the trend of the pre-war era, “fatherhood” became a corner stone of the foundation of American manhood during the war, as both the fathers who left to become

soldiers were hailed as heroes, and the fathers who didn't, became instrumental in wartime production. A result of World War II was therefore a dramatic increase in employment during the mobilization, and as the case was in World War I, men were able to "prove on the battlefield what they had found difficult to prove at the workplace and in their homes – that they were dedicated providers and protectors" (Kimmel 147). Saving the world from German Nazism and anti-Semite genocide became a "moral crusade", and partaking in it became a symbol of military might, and, by extension of that, "manhood" (Kimmel 147). However, as the heroic soldier returned home, he faced lethargy and the lingering effects of shellshock; he was forced to attempt to reconcile with a continued existence as a civilian, but the ethos "[...] 'Learning to live with it' offered little solace" (Kimmel 148). This double image of the American male as both aggressive and heroic on one side, and responsible and righteous on the other, lead to, according to anthropologist Margaret Mead, a "chronic restlessness and anxiousness" as a result of the "contradictory cultural messages that form the backbone of male socialization" (qtd. in Kimmel 151). This image caused uncertainty as the suburban breadwinner father "didn't [...] know who he was [and had to] figure out who he wasn't" (Kimmel 155). As contemporary man failed to identify who he was, he instead became alienated, an individual with "opinions and prejudices, but no convictions, [who] has likes and dislikes, but no will" (Kimmel 158). Where, previously, the perception of manhood had been shored up by the exclusion of black men and immigrants, the mid to late 1950s saw the increased ridicule of the working-class man as he was presented as ineffectual: An adult delinquent whose family and work life was a failure. While not all working-class men were the object of this middle-class ridicule, they were forced to "redeem themselves by subscribing to middle-class values", and manhood was, as a result, not about the "color of one's collar but about the values one held and the willingness to stand up for them" (Kimmel 164). Men, both working- and middle-class were, increasingly, urged to find solace in their fatherly responsibility, and to retreat home as "frightened fathers preventing the next generation's sexual deviance" (Kimmel 166). Fatherhood's relation to the era's fear of the effeminate and homosexual and the idealization of the father-to-son relationship are prevalent themes in several of the stories in *On the Line*, as Swados presents "unsuccessful" fathers who, with no sons, or with an emotionally barren relationship to their son(s), are left without this venue for defining their own masculinity.

Having lost their will, men turned into "depersonalized cogs in the corporate machine [and] also lost their sense of themselves as men, [feeling] dwarfed and helpless" (Kimmel



158). Sociologist David Riesman portrayed the social psychology of the time as one of conformity, arguing in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) that the nineteenth century man had been “inner directed”, while the contemporary male had become “other directed”; where the nineteenth-century male wanted to carve out a place for him, the modern man, instead of being proud that he could stand out as an individual, was a man that worried relentlessly about fitting in (Kimmel 158). This helpless worker was alone in a difficult world, where he faced more than simply emasculating work, but also the cries of black men who sought acceptance as men, and from women who longed to get out of the house and into the workforce (Kimmel 158). Feeling helpless, men attempted to reconcile with their time, and subdued their ambition into passivity, a phenomenon described by novelist Norman Mailer as “a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled” (qtd. in Kimmel 159). Explaining specifically the reactions of the working-class, Cohen’s *The Culture of the Gang* asserted that this led to unrest: “a delinquent subculture [whose rebellion] provided not only grounds to demonstrate manly aggression but also an alternative work environment where men might experience success in deviant behavior” and where men were offered the opportunity to “retaliate against those norms that they believed had emasculated them” (qtd. in Kimmel 160). The result was the working class focus on toughness (as exemplified and critiqued through Orrin, in “On the Line”), which Walter Miller explained as in continuous “rebellion, not against a class, but against the ‘feminine principle’ in society” (qtd. in Kimmel 161). Despite this, it seemed that the only way a man could conform his status was as a breadwinner and family provider: “virtually the only way to be a real man in our society is to have an adequate job and earn a living” (qtd. in Kimmel 161). Real men were, in short, breadwinning men.

As domestic, and workplace life, became more dull and boring, and routines less and less exciting, the more “exciting and glamorous [men’s] fantasies of escape [became]” (Kimmel 165). The movies of John Wayne offered this generation an outlet through the “two fisted loner who would not get tied down by domestic responsibility but always kept moving towards the edges of society, toward the frontier” (Kimmel 166). Combined with the men’s magazines of the time, the “playboy” image of the autonomous man as “all sexual proves without responsibility”, American men were presented the image of manhood as most profoundly “boys at play, not men at work”, and thus work came to be seen as an enemy rather than an ally (Kimmel 167). As historian Arthur Schlesinger put it in 1958: “Today men are more conscious of maleness not as a fact but as a problem. The ways by which American

men affirm their masculinity are uncertain and obscure” (qtd. in Kimmel 173). It was in this historical context, Harvey Swados published *On the Line*, presenting in his eight short stories men who were, in every sense of the words, “stuck at work” and who in many cases faced the emasculation of their autonomy and their inability to define their manhood, both at the factory and in their homes.

## **Masculine Relationships**

The importance of the father-son relationship has varied in historical context. At times, the relationship has been practically non-existent, and a boy would grow up with his father being absent, and without any other male role model. From the late eighteenth century, the cultural opinion of women’s moral character turned positive, and mothers became expected to mold the characters and virtues of their sons (Rotundo 28). The early American colonists had believed that the mother’s love was “uncritical and indulgent”, and therefore not fit for, and would ruin, older children and boys. The early nineteenth-century boy, however, was at the mercy and responsibility of his mother, and was from, and early age, treated as, and dressed in the same “loose-fitting gowns that their sisters wore” (Rotundo 33). Prior to the 1880s, “little boys and little girls were dressed identically” (Kimmel 107). The physical tie to the home was lessened as a boy passed his seventh or eighth year of age, however while his mother was still responsible for his moral upbringing, the culture he emerged into was not dominated by a father like figure (Rotundo 34). As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, and the free roaming boy culture of the republic became more confined because of the increasing urbanization, as well as the diminished importance of the apprenticeship, young males stayed home longer than before. As explained above, with the end of the century’s obsession with effeminacy and heterosexual masculinity, the parental responsibility of the father increased in importance, and it became up to the father to form a bond with his son, to ensure the well being of future male generation(s). Subsequently, boys’ and girls’ “spheres of play” were separated, and fathers sought father-son relationships, fearing that “a young boy’s identification with his mother and sissification by playing with his sisters” (Kimmel 107). The father-son relationship came to be seen as the foundation of the son’s future, and it became idealized as an outlet for masculine paternal responsibility through ensuring the son’s future heterosexuality. It also became an emotional outlet for a father who faced work-place alienation, and could find no other acceptable domesticity than with his male heir(s). The father-son relationship, though, has

always been problematic, as we will see in “Joe, the Vanishing American,” “A Present for the Boy,” and “On the Line.”

The father-son “creation myth”, and practically the first story about the relationship between a father and his son, as well as the foundation for the Christian culture, is Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac (Lorentzen 119). Jørgen Lorentzen explains how a general theological reading of the story advocates the Binding of Isaac as an example of the importance of obedience to God. However if one rejects the theological suspension of morality and ethics, we find that Abraham is transformed from an obedient and pious man, into a murderer (Lorentzen 120). The main question presented becomes “Why does Abraham not beg for his son’s life?” Lorentzen cites the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who presents a radical ethical perception of the subject: In Levinas ethics, it is the “other” that compromises “my” freedom (Lorentzen 123). It is this act of violence that Abraham commits in his search for pious totality when he reduces Isaac to an object that he can trade to God to show his obedience. The story can be seen as a primal example of the father-son relationship, but one that has been warped by religion into a story about obedience; obedience comes at a cost, as the son must be sacrificed to appease a figure who already rules with absolute authority: God (Lorentzen 125). This sacrifice becomes the first in a long line of sacrifices; the history of the west is to a great extent a history where the patriarch has sacrificed his sons religiously for their own gains in war, politics, and in the name of science (Lorentzen 126). Being subject of this sacrifice is not reserved for the younger generation. Every man has had a father, and every son has been influenced by the presence, or the lack of the presence, of his father. In relation to *On the Line*, this “sacrifice” of the son is problematized in ways of varying subtlety, but it is, as in society, a result of objectifying patriarchal oppression that invalidates or oppresses the individual’s desires and preferences.

A central problem in contemporary masculinity is that of male to male friendship. Friendship is offered as solution to the problem of loneliness and isolation in an urbane society, and as a response to individualism (Lorentzen 93). However from a man’s perspective, friendship becomes problematic. It has, traditionally, been women that have nurtured friendship in family matters, and this responsibility towards friendship is at odds with the traditional masculine ideal of autonomy (Lorentzen 95). While the mutual responsibility of male friendship is at odds with the importance of autonomy in the traditional masculine ideal, it was the exclusion of homosexuality from heterosexuality that caused a rift

between men that many find hard to patch. The great epics of the Ancient Era, for example *Gilgamesh* and *The Iliad*, portray the hyper-masculine in combination with the close and loving friendships (relationships) between men, where the greatest hero of them all, Achilles, is both a tower of strength and a well of boundless emotion (Lorentzen 96-98). This kind of emotional, homoerotic, but not homosexual, friendship was not uncommon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; however towards the end of the 1800s, the fear of being misunderstood or mistaken as homosexual was rampant. The image of the tender man as a threat to the nation, advocated chiefly by Theodore Roosevelt in his “Strenuous Life” speech, combined with the Social Darwinist thoughts of G. Stanley Hall in the form of the *theory of recapitulation*, concluded that an “adolescent boy with feminine character was simply a degenerate [...] an evolutionary mistake” (Rotundo 268-269). The “confused identification” of a male homosexual as a man who looked and acted feminine, as opposed to a man who engaged in homosexual activity, continued to gain insidiousness from the notion of modern sexuality as a natural condition, which “added urgency to a man’s desire to distinguish himself from the homosexual” (Rotundo 278). Deep or romantic friendship between men vanished, as a sharp line was drawn between men who were effeminate (or preferred “effeminate” past-times) and those who were heterosexual. The latter, the preference for “effeminate” past times is exemplified and critiqued through the protagonist of “The Day the Singer Fell,” where we find that LeRoy’s acceptance into the work-place’s homosocial setting comes only as a result of his being unable to sing anymore.

Even today, friendships between men are kept distant to avoid rocking the foundation of a given man’s heterosexuality (Lorentzen 106). The emergence of the word “bromance” in recent years can also be seen as a way of hiding the sexual-romantic elements of male friendship behind an impenetrable wall of incest taboo that makes friendship non-sexually acceptable (Elliot).

In a world where female sexuality has become discourse, it is surprising that that the discussion regarding male sexuality has been so absent (Lorentzen 152). Since the philosophies of Francis Bacon in the 1600s, there has been no room for body or emotions in rationality, and men as the keepers of rationality have been exempt from the discourse and inclusion of emotion and sexuality that have been granted to women (Lorentzen 152). This can for instance be seen as evident in the discussion on the horrors of female genital mutilation, a topic that is given exceedingly more attention than that of male genital

mutilation: circumcision (Lorentzen 154). Because of the lack of discourse focusing on male sexuality, it has, according to some, become simplified; a phallic-centric obsession with male sexuality reduces what should be a cognitive sexual desire into component acts, completely removed from a man's personality: seduction, erection, penetration, ejaculation, and withdrawal (Lorentzen 150). With the burden of male sexuality put on the penis, combined with a lack of understanding of, or acceptance for, non-phallic elements of male sexuality, the penis becomes a "sexual missile" that can be only, and nothing else than, a double edged weapon (Lorentzen 156). This two dimensional perception of male sexuality combined with the imagery of male autoeroticism as shameful, contrasted to the sexual liberation of the female, creates a male sexuality that becomes a manifestation of shame, rather than pride.

### **Oppressive Gender Roles**

Broadly speaking, gender roles as a concept is oppressive both to men and women, but societal gender expectations tend to attach more value to what is considered masculine, and perhaps more significantly, define men as agents, individuals that are assumed to be capable of "producing". Women, who are not "producers", have been defined either as reproducers, or alternatively, as simply "decoration", depending on how misogynistic one's viewpoint is. An example of this kind of ideology of hard-coded gender roles is Talcott Parson's notion of *gender complementarity*. The basic argument stems from the belief that men and women were, combined, best served in a "complementary" relationship where the man was the breadwinner and his wife was the "homemaker" (Kimmel, *Handbook*, 30). Throughout nineteenth and early to mid twentieth-century, the doctrine of the separate spheres was culturally significant in Europe and America, and we can see this division, and how damaging it can be, in most of the heterosocial relations in *On the Line*. Utilizing various arguments, from a God given right to rule to precedent(s) set down by ancient Greek philosophers to notions of bio-determinism (otherwise known as evolutionary psychology) that advocated man's superiority based on general male physical strength, male institutions battled to keep women inferior. In general, the oppressive characteristics of assumed gender roles (gender normativity) stem from the blanket assumption that an individual's thoughts, longings, opinions, and desires are represented by the cultural and societal characteristics stereotyped by the sex which they happen to be born into. Gender unfortunately is extremely important to humans and physical gender is often one of the first things we notice when a baby is born. Often before we notice if the child is healthy or not (Lorentzen 11). Gender normative

discrimination occurs, then, when an individual is barred or pressured from enjoying what should be an individual's right to expression, because of cultural inhibitors. Likewise, gender normative discrimination pressures the individual to adhere to standards he or she is in disagreement with out of fear for being ostracized. A lifetime of being subject to gender normative discrimination can lead to "internalizing" discrimination, meaning that a person becomes an advocate for a system, or a set of systems, that oppresses him or herself.

Feminism is not a modern-day ideology. Pioneering women at the Seneca Falls Women's Right's Convention in 1848 attempted to add to the Declaration of Independence the sentiment that "all men *and women* are created equal" (Gardiner 37, emphasis mine). While unsuccessful, it is important to remember that feminist ideals have existed for longer than the Women's Suffrage Movement. Women living prior to organized movements for women's rights claimed to be equal to men and that men were not equal to the ideal they promoted, but more importantly, that "men and masculinity placed women and femininity in a subordinate position" (Gardiner 36). These theories asserted that cultural ideologies favored men, and that social institutions reflected that favoritism, and that, as a result, men benefitted from women's subordination. This favoritism, feminist theory charged, was inherently flawed, as the idealistic depiction of men as the embodiment of reason humanity was at odds with the evils men did. Men frequently displayed irrationality and a viciousness (an unfairness Swados' problematizes in "Just One of the Boys," where the protagonist is unable to contain his hypocrisy) that misogynists continuously attributed to women (Gardiner 36). It is important to be aware, however, that support for feminist ideals, and arguments proposing suffrage, have come from American men since the foundation of the republic in 1776.<sup>4</sup> What is significant with the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the broad sweeping organization of the Women's Rights Movement.

Since the 1970s, feminists (and their allies) have succeeded in making female sexuality a discourse (Gardiner 35, Lorentzen 151). Their most important accomplishment has been the concept of gender as a social construction, and the promotion of the idea that gender and traditional sexual values are historically variable, rather than biologically determined facts of life (Gardiner 35). Admittedly, even this achievement is criticized, as studies on transgenderism have revealed that an individual does not simply assimilate into the gender society constructs for them. The National Organization for Women, founded in 1966, sought gender equality through law and social acceptance for childhood socialization, as well as

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Against the Tide: Pro-feminist Men in the United States 1776-1990*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

promoting equal treatment for boys and girls in education (Gardiner 37). N.O.W. encouraged men to enter into their organization, and urged women to enter male-dominated occupations.

There are, and have been, various forms of feminism, most controversial among them being Radical Feminism. Radical Feminism attacks masculinity rather than defending itself against sexist charges about women's inferiority. It was Radical Feminism that articulated sexual harassment as a crime, as well as advocating "sexual objectification of women as a pervasive component of gender inequality" (Gardiner 41). Other, less radical feminist theories, chief among them the cultural feminist theories, strive to problematize male aggression and other traditionally gendered characteristics of masculinity as innate, but rather as developed in men by other social practices such as mother-dominated child rearing (Gardiner 41). Some feminist theorists, for example Dorothy Dinnerstein, argue this point from the assertion that the universal child rearing control of women explains misogyny, because "all infants fear their mothers' life-giving or withholding powers", and transfer these subconscious associations onto all women (Gardiner 41). Other feminist branches, for example Eco-Feminism, argue that "environmentally destructive ethos include a cultivation of hyper-masculinity", at its most extreme exemplified by the "culture of nuclear destruction" (Gardiner 40). However, Eco-Feminism has tended to admit that this "culture of nuclear destruction" is a "private men's club", acknowledging that the authority of this destructive "force" of patriarchy is in the hands of a numerical minority of men (Gardiner 40). This masculinity, that values competition among men, eco-feminism asserts, subjugates both woman and nature, and imperils the planet.

Masculinities as a group of social theories are a relatively new concept. In recent decades, the study of gender as a concept has "expanded rapidly and with it, studies of gender issues about men and masculinities" (Kimmel, *Handbook*, 1). The study of gender has been, by and large, promoted by women, and has addressed gender from women's point of view. However as the dynamics of gender have been revealed, it has made masculinity visible, and has allowed a new approach to the problematic position of men (Kimmel, *Handbook*, 1). Feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti (2002), for instance, argues that "the price men pay for representing the universal is disembodiment or loss of gendered specificity into the abstraction of phallic masculinity" (Gardiner 37). This "phallic masculinity" has also been assaulted by Luce Irigaray (1985), who reversed Freud's "penis envy", turning it on men, asserting it was a "defining characteristics of the masculine psyche" (Gardiner 38). Irigaray

claimed that the concept of women being “penis envious” is largely a male self defense mechanism against “castration fear” (Gardiner 38). This unconscious fear of losing one’s potency fuels men’s fantasies of dominating women, (and other men, as in Orrin of “On the Line”), but could also be a motive for joining in challenging the gender order, in order to free oneself from “impossible standards of masculinity against which they will always fail” (Gardiner 38). Some feminist theories are frequently referred to as “male bashing”, because they focus on “male violence against women and on men’s sexual objectification of women as the very definitions of masculinity” (Gardiner 39). However a more accepting train of thought argues that while it is problematic that men make their behavior the norm, this norm is inherently harmful for both women and men (Gardiner 40). The argument follows that being the norm, in this sense, is also being invisible, preventing individual expression of the self, but without explicit oppression that warrants a cry against discrimination. This implication of the invisibility of the individual is critiqued by Swados, both from the point of view of the individual being oppressed or pigeon holed, but also in the way protagonists and minor characters reinforce the hostility of normativity in their environment.

Misogyny created feminist theory, and feminist theory has helped create masculinity theory, but as feminist theories charged that cultural ideologies favored men, they, initially, did so despite the great disparity in advantages between individual groups of men (Gardiner 36). The previously dominant position of the “gender binary”, the belief that the feminine and the masculine are inherently opposites, has led to the belief that gender equality is a “zero sum game”, where if one part gains acceptance or a human right, the other part must lose some. This has been a prison for both mind and body (Lorentzen 74). Thirty years ago biological “sex” was the dominant concept, but feminist studies have shown that the social aspects of gender are important. In his groundbreaking *Masculinities*, sociologist R. W. Connell presents four different forms of masculinity: the hegemonic, the complicit, the subordinate, and the marginalized (Lorentzen 44). Hegemonic masculinity is at all times the influential and dominating form of masculinity, a masculinity that is advocated by a numerical minority of white men with societal, political, or economic power (Lorentzen 44). The other masculinities are oppressed by the hegemonic masculinity, but the complicit masculinity is the numeric majority that associate themselves with the hegemonic form, and complicity supports it without having any influential power of its own (Lorentzen 44). This criticism of the hegemonic masculinity establishes that the majority of men are at the mercy of patriarchy. Complicit masculinity is central to several stories in *On the Line*, especially



“On the Line,” “Just One of the Boys,” and “Joe, the Vanishing American.” It is also criticized through Swados’ presentation of the dangers of consumerist masculinity in “Fawn, With a Bit of Green.”

In general, masculinities as a study stems from the realization that normativity creates invisibility and that the individual man cannot battle his problems by virtue of being human, rather than what he is: male (Lorentzen 18). One way of accomplishing this is to charge stereotypes with presenting an eschewed reality, which is a central tenet in *On the Line*. Roland Barthes advocated that “All official institutions of language are repeating machines: school, sports, advertising, popular songs, news, all continually repeat the same structure, the same meaning, often the same words: the stereotype is a political fact [...]” (Barthes 40). In that sense, the stereotype as a fact denies the possibility of conflicting realities; it discards men with no interest in, for instance, subscribing to hyper-masculinity and the importance of the physically imposing “hard body” (Lorentzen 102). The promotion of such ideals rather than the realistic approach that advocates an acceptance of individual preferences can lead to what Jean-Paul Sartre would call “inauthentic” human beings, unable to act but obsessed with the search for essence (Lorentzen 46).

It is somewhat understandable that cultures divide work between different agents that follow gender lines, however the “problem” for men and women in modernity has been that this division of labor, and what has been acceptable or not, has been absolute (Lorentzen 74). For men, their sphere has been that of the public, and their role, that of the breadwinner. While this hard-coded binary has been disputed and, in the last decades, cultures approaching egalitarianism have seen women gain previously assumed male traits in a way that they can no longer be described as manly, the opposite is not, unfortunately, true (Lorentzen 161). Work, and the breadwinner concept, has been culturally defining mark for the American male since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the “antidote to male self-doubt was not self-examination but ‘untiring perseverance’ and a redoubling of effort” (Rotundo 175). As the 19<sup>th</sup> century household taught children that maleness was linked to power, independence, and freedom of action, the connection becomes problematic as the scale of urban life “compounded the trouble created by massive corporations” (Rotundo 176, 249). The idea that men are “providers” is a persistent one that remains in many modern cultures. It is entirely possible to argue that the “provider” is a “major element in the construction of masculine identity; it is a moral as well as an economic category” (Morgan 169). While providing for your family is a

noble end, one that both men and women should actively pursue, the ideology becomes problematic at times when the man is either unhappy with his job (e.g. LeRoy in “The Day the Singer Fell” or Buster in “Just One of the Boys”) or unable to be the provider (for example as a result of failed business ventures, exemplified by Orrin in “On the Line” or Frank in “Back in the Saddle Again”). If a man’s identity is built upon being the breadwinner, what identity is left for him without this role? What masculinities as a field of study attempts to accomplish is to provide a reassuring answer that can be more than the two-dimensional stereotype, allowing men to experience a greater sense of self realization outside the boundaries of gender normative stereotypes.

As David Morgan presents it: “[c]lass is one of a number of social hierarchies or systems of social stratification that have represented core elements in sociological analysis” (165). Class stratification is closely associated with both capitalist and industrial societies, and class may overlap with other systems that result in stratification, chief amongst them gender, age, race, and ethnicity. What these systems have in common is that an element from one hierarchy cannot be seen in isolation from other systems. A working class black woman cannot be considered, nor does she exist, as only one of these characteristics. The result of either characteristic, however, is that they separate human beings into pockets of unequal power distribution. As with other areas of discussion on gender, the combined concepts of gender and class have lead primarily to a discussion on women’s marginalized role in traditional class analysis. Class analysis has, in recent years, returned from presumed irrelevance in the years following the collapse of the Berlin Wall to pose one interesting question: “If, as the class and gender debates suggested, class had been fairly strongly linked to themes of men and masculinity, were there links between the changes in gender order and changes in the position of class [analysis]?” (Morgan 166). A topic having direct bearing on gendered analysis of class is the debate centering on what kind of “unit” analysts should consider relevant. And this becomes the crux of the masculine class debate: “class is gendered, and men have assumed, or been allocated the role of class agents” (Morgan 168). In short, this stems from connections between ownership, occupation, and masculinities, and the historically strong tendency for inheritance of family name, social position, and property in the male line. Additionally, the concepts of class struggle and class identity have been located firmly in the “public sphere, the sphere of employment [...]” (Morgan 169). The location of class in the public sphere gives birth to the concept of “the family wage.” Being so closely knit to the “breadwinner” role, one finds that from an economic point of view the man’s class

defined the woman's (Morgan 165-169). This compounds the responsibility of the family father to ensure the wellbeing of himself, his wife, and his children, and can, in some cases, lead to being forced to accept personal unhappiness and suffering, to ensure the happiness of others. Enduring personal suffering can be a noble sacrifice in and of itself, but one that could be lessened or abolished with the introduction of the egalitarian family unit.

In addition to being defining for the family unit, class may go hand in hand with masculinity for a given individual man: "It can also be argued that class contributed to both a unified sense of masculinity and more diffused, perhaps more conflictual, models of masculinities" (Morgan 169). Firstly, many men, regardless of the amount, or source, of their income, would be likely to identify with a masculine role as provider. Secondly, and traditionally a notion associated with the working class, men's class masculinity might lead to notions of collective solidarity. Specifically for the working class, the representative imagery for their class struggle has also been frequently masculine: hammers or clenched fists. It is, all the same, important to note that while class struggle imagery and rhetoric has been predominately masculine, should be recognized as such, there is a vast diversity within masculine gender class issues, where some masculinities are more dominant or influential than others. It is clear then, that despite the arguments that the working class identified closer to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century middle class than the working class had ever before, that the nature of work itself had an important impact on the individual man's masculinity, both as he performed his job, and as being given, willingly or unwillingly, responsibility for his family's social status through his abilities as breadwinner. This, in essence, is what Swados focuses on in *On the Line*.

## Chapter 3: Genre Theory

Discussion concerning the short story as a genre is mainly split between two groups of proponents that argue differing approaches as baseline for any sort of definition. On one hand, there are theorists who argue that there must be something inherently different that sets the short story apart from the novel. Representatives of this approach to defining the short story appear to, in some cases, argue for the suitability of theme to structure, and attempt to draw connections between content and form. This point of view argues that the short story as a genre is different from other literary genres by characteristics unique to the short story. Examples of representatives of this type of “single-trait” approach are Mary Rohrberger, Charles May, and Valerie Shaw. On the other hand, proponents of the opposite approach argue that whatever characteristic(s) one may identify as being part of short stories differ from the novel by degree rather than kind. They argue that one cannot “derive particular forms from a general principle; such distinctions must be looked for elsewhere” (Friedman 24). This leads, logically, to scrutiny of the one characteristic where short stories tend to differ from other kinds of stories, namely their shortness. Main exemplars of this line of thought are Susan Lohafer and John Gerlach. This direction of study focuses on the aspects of endings, and it “attempts to derive structural distinctions from structural principles” (Friedman 24). According to Norman Friedman, this group focuses on two of Edgar Allan Poe’s central principles, one of which claims that the “desired singleness of effect can only be achieved by a work which is short enough to be read at a single sitting” (Friedman 24). The other principle asserts that the end of the short story controls the beginning and middle; however Friedman comments that it is rather the “*imminence* of the end [...] which creates effects differentiating from longer or shorter works” (Friedman 26).

Focus on the imminence of the end in short stories has lead to theories regarding the direct and indirect route towards the end, proposed by John Gerlach, as well as his scrutiny of the closural force in short fictional narratives. Although Gerlach admits that these signals of closure are the same in all genres, he argues that the difference is one of degree; the novel advances and develops its theme, while the short story merely shows it (Friedman 28). While asserting that there are numerous valid criticisms of this kind of approach, Friedman goes on to support it, declaring that he does not think “we can argue from the structural facts of

shortness to any other structural fact except the recall of detail, and least of all can we argue from a structural to a thematic fact or vice versa” (Friedman 29). The theoretical focus on the imminence of the end in short stories, and how the short story “merely” shows its theme relates to *On the Line* through our appreciation of the author’s expertise in the way he presents the individual stories’ theme(s), while simultaneously divulging the overarching theme of the collection. The temporal organization of the short story collection becomes thematically important for the work as a whole as characters introduced in one story exit the overarching narrative in another, or even between stories. This leads to a destabilized chronological hierarchy of events between the stories, and allows the events of one story to affect the others.. For example, it is divulged in “Just One of the Boys,” the seventh story of the collection, that the protagonist of the first story, “The Day the Singer Fell,” has left the factory. This information is not provided in that protagonist’s story, but this antithesis is emphasized when we learn that the events of “The Day the Singer Fell” have ramifications outside its own boundaries.

Temporal organization was chiefly distinguished by the Russian Formalists as being either *fabula* and *sjuzet*. *Fabula* as a concept presents the story in its most neutral, chronological, and objective form. In short, the *fabula* portrays the story as it might have unfolded in real world time and space, as a series of contiguous events from the point in time where the story begins, to where it ends. *Sjuzet*, differently, contains the actual text that imitates and presents to the reader the events of the *fabula*. This includes all the inevitable, and necessary, gaps, distortions, and elisions (Lodge 20). For the most part, the narration and presentation of time, space, and continuum is characteristically coherent throughout the eight stories of *On the Line*. Using the first story, “The Day the Singer Fell” as an example, one finds that the events of the story range from when LeRoy is introduced at Hampton Institute to the point when he returns to work after his accident. The time frame, the pace at which the *fabula* proceeds is uncertain. While the reader is given no indication of how far into her pregnancy Lily may be, we know that there is no mention of childbirth or any other kind of termination of pregnancy in the store after the accident, LeRoy pleads with Lily to be careful and not slip on her way home. This would most likely put the accident and subsequent return to work at the end of the story, before nine months of their marriage have passed. It can therefore be assumed that the *fabula* of “The Day the Singer Fell” includes LeRoy’s two and a half year stay at Hampton Institute, as well as a minimum of twelve months in New York.

The actual text presented differs, focusing more intensely on LeRoy's experiences and insecurities regarding Lily, the factory, and his lack of relationship with the other workers.

The concepts of *fabula* and *sjuzet* were expanded and reworked by Gérard Genette in his 1972 *Discours du récit*, where he established areas where either *sjuzet* or *fabula* were to significantly affect or modify each other. Firstly Genette established that *sjuzet* modifies *fabula* through the characteristic of "time", and what Lodge describes to be generally perceived as "point of view", although Genette "correctly distinguishes [...] between 'perspective' (who sees the action) and 'voice' (who speaks the narration of it)" (Lodge 20). In addition, Genette describes three different categories of temporal hierarchy in which the *sjuzet* affects the *fabula*: order, duration, and frequency. Order concerns the relation between the *fabula*'s inevitably fixed series of events, as time proceeds from one point to another, and the not necessarily fixed order of events portrayed in the *sjuzet*. The second category, duration, concerns the relationship between the duration of events in real time (*fabula*), versus the time in which they are presented (*sjuzet*). Lastly, "frequency" concerns itself with "the relationship between the number of times an event occurs in the *fabula* and the number of times it is narrated in the *sjuzet*" (Lodge 20). Keeping in mind David Lodge's argument that the choices made by the creator of the narrative at this level are "prior to, or 'deeper' than his stylistic choices in composing the surface structure of the text", in mind, it will be prudent to consider the temporal aspects of the stories in *On the Line*. For the most part, the order of events in the narrative stays true to the order of events in the *fabula*, but some distortion occur. Firstly, the text may introduce the protagonist at the factory, as in Orrin's case ("On the Line"), followed immediately by events prior to the present conditions of the protagonist. These temporal shifts give insight into the characters existence of several months, or even years, prior to the events at the factory.

The narrator voice in *On the Line* allows himself to divulge the inner thoughts and feelings of the protagonists, describing their fears and doubts, albeit in general terms: "But [LeRoy] couldn't help being blue when he thought (and what else was there to do in the body shop except think about the same thing all day?) about what life would be like if he did not have the musical career to look forward to [...]" (10). The perspective of the narrator is that of the limited third person point of view, describing only that which is experienced by the protagonist, while still omitting details that are unimportant for the reader. An example of this

mode of voice is how most of the protagonist's co-workers are anonymous save for a handful, even though it is safe to assume that he has some knowledge of them or is familiar with their names. This further emphasizes the environment of social alienation and existential compartmentalization that the protagonists live in.

There are, according to John Gerlach, two different forms of narrative, the direct and the indirect. The direct narrative "foregrounds the movements toward closure" and the indirect, oppositely, "foregrounds the movement away from closure" (Friedman 28). Both forms are present in any narrative, but the important part is which of the two that dominates it. While both forms exist in any narrative, it is argued that the modern short story is more dependent on the indirect form, but still relies on the readers' experience of the direct form to succeed in portraying the narrative. Generalizations about whether or not some narrative structures are suitably only to the short story are not always consistent, but their presence can undoubtedly be identified in individual works or specific stories. In that sense, Gerlach's argument that the indirect form being more suited for stories of wish fulfillment might not be completely true for the stories presented in *On the Line*. Moving on from a discussion of direct form, Gerlach presents the "compressed form", arguing that it "may be regarded as a modernized version of the direct form, depending even more heavily on the original goals of direct form, singleness and compression", reasoning that the compressed story is an innovation of the direct form starting closer to the end (Gerlach 107). Foreshortening by starting closer to the end, the compressed form "[...] highlights an incident small and slight in itself, presenting it so that the reader must imagine a much larger context" (Gerlach 108). This incident would be so affected by the implied context that it alters both the past and the future, allowing the short story to equal the "range of a story spanning a much larger time" (Gerlach 108). We can see this in individual stories in *On the Line*, as in "The Day the Singer Fell", where the absoluteness of the end is implied to last forever or, more importantly, in the way the stories of the collection come together to form an example of a societal context in which men find themselves confined by their gender stereotype. In addition to the direct (and the evolved compressed form) or indirect mode of narration, the point of view of the narrator becomes an important aspect of the presentation of the narrative. When Genette distinguished, as noted above, between the two principal areas of influence by the *sjuzet* onto the *fabula*, the second category was "point of view". Point of view concerns itself with "perspective" or "who" sees the action, and "voice, the source for the narration of it (Lodge 20). The

perspective can include first, second, or third person approaches as well as the varying degrees (or lack of) omniscient detail available to the voice.

Many of the stories in *On the Line* deal with wish fulfillment, or the failure to fulfill it, as a central narrative plot, but I would argue that the mode of narration is direct according to Friedman's terminology (Friedman 28). The narrative presents the events directly, from the introduction of the protagonist's goal, to the closure that either fulfills or terminates it. The incident/closure is of immense thematic importance, and gives meaning to the rest of the narrative, but in terms of time and frame, small and slight. When LeRoy ("The Day the Singer Fell") slips on the conveyor belt and slices his throat open, the accident is, within both the *fabula* and the *sjuzet*, over in seconds. With only the short and medium term result of the accidents explicitly stated in the text, hospitalization and the return to work, the reader is left to his or her own devices to consider the protagonists' existence past textual termination. This allows the story to have a range of time spanning longer than both the *fabula* and the *sjuzet*. Despite characteristics from the indirect mode of narration, the dominant mode in most stories from *On the Line* is that of the direct (and compressed) form, as per the lack of tangential episodes: Hospitalization of LeRoy, the background story of Orrin, and the explanation of Frank's former failed business ventures are central parts of the dramatic events rather than tangents to the story, and does not oppose the direct mode of progress through the *sjuzet*.

Focus on the imminence of the end in the short story can lead to scrutiny of the structural aspects of "termination" of both story and text. The difference between termination of the story and termination of the text is in describing where, and how, the beginning of the end is identified, and how it relates to the finality of the actual text. The definition of closure by Barbara Smith, one of "the first to use the word as a literary term," asserts closure to consist of three main characteristics: "coherence, completeness, and stability" (Gerlach 8). The term closure evaluates neither quality nor quantity; the amount, or degree, of closure in a work has no impact on the quality of the work; the term "closure" is simply used to identify the "signal that movement may stop, that nothing more will follow" (Gerlach 8). While Gerlach has admitted that these signals of closure are not unique to the genre of short story fiction, he proposes that all short stories include at least one out of five identifiable signals of closure: "solution of the central problem, natural termination, completion of antithesis, manifestation of a moral, [or] encapsulation" (Gerlach 8). He goes on to assert that the closural forces of "central problem" and "manifestation of moral" are "particularly significant



for the short story. The central problem is unique because short stories, more often than novels, tend to focus on only *one* problem” (Gerlach 8, emphasis mine).

The first signal of closure presented, concerns itself with the completion of a central goal. Commonly, a character in a story faces a problem, which can be a desire to attain, or alternatively rid him- or herself of, a status or an object. Closure is then achieved if the character solves the problem, and is awarded with whatever prize completing the problem offers. The nature of this prize may be connected to the closural signal of natural termination, as explained below. It also logically follows, that failure to solve the central problems also leads to closure. Few short stories, however, according to Gerlach, “especially modern stories, reveal their problems directly” (Gerlach 9). The closural signal of “natural termination” is the completion of an action that has an end that can be considered definite, or predictable. Examples of natural termination can be the less radical, as in sleep, or return to home from a visit, the arrival of a train that spells imminent departure, or the more dramatic as in the death of the protagonist of a story. Death is a signal that is “very final, stable, though not necessarily [a] coherent end to [the] story” (Gerlach 9). In some cases, natural termination can occur as radical without any imagery of death, as in Bret Harte’s stories about love between men, where “the replacement of primary male same-sex bond with one or two cross-sex relationships” come across as both dramatic and final (Nissen 189). Another example of natural termination of a narrative without death, can be the protagonists’ attainment of a mental state, such as nirvana (for example by solving the central problem), or bliss, regardless of whether “the bliss is ironic, [or] if a character deludes himself” (Gerlach 9).

The third signal of closure is designated as “completion of antithesis”. Antithetical markers of closure can “indicate that new boundaries have been established, so that new territory (in its metaphorical sense) need not be explored” (Gerlach 10). They can be circular in nature; however a broad definition of antithesis is “any opposition, often characterized by irony, that indicates something has polarized into extremes” (Gerlach 10). This polarization includes signals (for instance of the central problem) in the story changing from positive to negative, or from negative to positive: “if a character changes from hating to loving something, or someone, the movement from the extreme of one pole to the other carries [...] antithetical force” (Gerlach 10). Importantly, Gerlach also asserts that the degree or quantity of metaphorical space between the poles is unimportant, and insignificant, as long as polarity is established. He also argues that antithesis is the signal of termination that is “most firmly

anchored not just in narrative but the in the act of perception [and that it] is the most primitive yet also the most subtle of signals, for it is easily varied” (Gerlach 11).

The fourth signal of closure is the “manifestation of moral”. Broadly defined, the “moral has become the theme or characters’ (or reader’s) self-realization” (Gerlach 12). Gerlach does declare moral synonymous with theme, but proposes that once the reader has perceived that a theme has emerged, it may give a short story a sense of having come to an end. Differing from the longer and potentially more elaborate novel, that can afford to “[announce] its theme clearly”, the short story can sometimes “merely in showing it has a theme [...] come to an end” (Gerlach 12).

The fifth, and final, signal of closure is “encapsulation”. Encapsulation is described as “a coda that distances the reader from the story by altering the point of view or summarizing the passing of time” (Gerlach 12). The example given by Gerlach that illustrates this jump in time is from the short story “The Jewbird” by author Bernard Malamud, where there occurs a significant jump in time between the penultimate and the ultimate sentence (Gerlach 13).

Signals of closure appear, logically, to occur in relation to moments of narrative decision, where the story takes a turn, at least for the subjects of the story, for better or for worse. Such moments are resolutions to what Roland Barthes refers to as *nuclei*. These nuclei “open or close alternatives that are of direct consequence for the subsequent development of the narrative and cannot be deleted without altering the story” (Lodge 19). A story may, indeed often does, contain several nuclei. The example Lodge provides, is an analysis of Ernest Hemingway’s short story “Cat in the Rain”, identifying four nuclei in the story, where each nucleus “[open] possibilities which might be closed in different ways” (Lodge 27). Closural force applies differently, and in some cases individually, to each nucleus. Some nuclei are also left entirely unaffected, by being, effectively, trumped and unraveled by another, more hierarchically important nucleus. In “Cat in the Rain”, the question “will the wife or the husband go fetch *the* cat” (emphasis mine”) or “will the wife get wet” is left unanswered by the introduction of the fourth nuclei “who is at the door?”. Closure occurs when the maid (closing the fourth nuclei) appears at the door carrying not *the* cat, but *a* cat, effectively ending, albeit ambiguously, the story by answering the question “Will the wife get the cat?” Closure can, in other words, occur as the solution to or immediate effect of the fulfillment, positive or negative, of a nucleus.

These different signals of closure seldom occur in isolation. Like the “means” by which we arrive at the end of the story, the direct or indirect mode of narration, the question is not whether a story can be identified as having a single definite element of closure, but rather to which degree one out of the five can be considered dominant (or alternatively, which closural force is absent) (Gerlach 16). This may lead to stories where the closural force appears to conform strongly to either one of the five categories, but also has elements of one or more of the others. For example, a story may have significant encapsulation together with a solution to a central problem, and a solution to a central problem may very well go hand in hand with elements of antithesis. Close reading *On the Line* reveals that most of the stories contain elements from all of the closural signals identified by John Gerlach. The “central problem” presented, and subsequently resolved, or alternatively, not resolved, is the protagonist’s goal (or, as LeRoy himself puts it, his “expectation”) of pursuing a career as a musician, saving money to go to college, returning to work to save up for a pension, or similar (16). Closure of the central problem occurs when, for LeRoy, as a result of the factory accident, his voice is transformed from its previous “golden throat” into a “husky [and coarse] state” (21). This closure is presented in correlation with the signal of natural termination; natural termination occurs in the permanent and definite “death” of a physical feature or characteristic of the protagonist. In the case of Pop, natural termination occurs with the literal termination (death) of his son Rudy. Despite the presence of all of the above closural signals in *On the Line*, it is the “completion of antithesis” that stands out as dominant. While closure is initiated by the protagonist’s failure to accomplish his central problem, it is the establishment of new territory that lends finality to the termination of the central problem. While the reader is free to speculate otherwise, the protagonist is presented no other explicit fate than acceptance; he is forced to continue to go to work like an automaton, subjecting himself to his previously stated fears of “being stuck here forever with no hope of escape” (10). Antithesis, in other words, presents itself as LeRoy’s, at least superficially, stoic reconciliation of his situation; his hopes and expectation(s) have polarized into silent obedient consent towards the finality of reality. While thematically important in relation to revealing the main character’s naiveté, or possibly self delusion, as discussed below, a moral as effective closure occurs only as a minute point, when the protagonist himself states that “Sometimes when you ride too high you know you’re going to fall” (21). For other characters, this antithesis, and subsequent reconciliation, successful or not, with new mental territory, as in Harold’s dispelling of his veil of self delusion, in Pop’s enactment of the same self

delusionary self protective cognitive dissonance barriers, or for Frank, the realization that his shame is purely internal.

Closing the narrative, and lending finality to the resolution of the central problem, the definite completion of antithesis, is often presented through the lens of encapsulation. In the final paragraphs of the stories, the narrator distances himself from the *sjuzet*, and an extreme time boundary may occur as the perspective of the narrative shifts to the omniscient infinite. This encapsulation frames the story up to that point by informing the reader that, for example LeRoy “never sang again”, establishing that this new territory that LeRoy is forced to accept, lasts forever, or that Frank, hand in hand with his wife “strolled leisurely through the friendly throng toward the last little victory of the wandering afternoon”, implying that there are, indeed, more victories in other afternoons (22, 233).

Literary theorist Rolf Lundén advocates the use of the term “composite” to describe short story collections where there is a relatively coherent sense of belonging between the individual stories. Lundén explains how some of the short story collections of old have been, according to Viktor Shklovsky, connected through use of, for example, frame stories (e.g. *A Thousand and One Nights* and *The Canterbury Tales*), or through what Shklovsky called “threading”: “the continuous presence of a protagonist or of the device of the journey [...] unified the individual episodes” (qtd. in Lundén 7). Lundén continues to assert that the composite, together with the short story “cycle” or the “sequence,” is located in a “fictional no-man’s land between the novel and the short story collection [and] has not been acknowledged as a separate genre” (Lundén 11). The term “composite” is also advocated by Raymond Joel Silverman, who defines it as “a group of stories written by one author, arranged in a definite order, and intended to produce a specific effect” (qtd. in Lundén 14). Further, Silverman explains how “every story of a composite can be understood in isolation, the stories have an added dimension when seen as co-ordinate parts of a larger whole” (qtd. in Lundén 33). It appears fitting, then, to describe *On the Line* as a composite that “in a continuum from fusion to fragmentation [...] would be placed closer to fusion [...] it] does not possess the degree of rupture and disunity that distinguish such works as *In Our Time*” (Lundén 116). For practical purposes, this means that the reader should be careful and take note of not only the use of the protagonist of one story as secondary or minor character in another (such as Orrin from “On the Line” appearing in “A Present for the Boy”, or Walter from “Joe, the Vanishing American” being mentioned in several other stories), but also

mentions of outcomes for protagonists of other stories than the one currently being narrated. An example of the latter would be how Buster in “Just one of the Boys” explains how he had *had* a “crazy Negro” working for him, implying that LeRoy of “The Day the Singer Fell” quit his job after all (176, emphasis mine). It is important to remember, however, that despite the wide gaps between the stories, “authors of short story composites seem rather to resist too much co-authorship from the reader”, and the spaces are not necessarily meant to be filled (Lundén 68). Thus, we must be careful not to assert too much concerning the intermittent parts of the composite.

## Chapter 4: *On the Line*

Knowing our feelings is a key source of political understanding. So often it seems that our problems are unique, highly personal, private only to ourselves. But, as soon as we begin to share our doubts, worries and problems with other men, we come to see that we are not alone, and that our difficulties are shared by others as well.

(Wernette 424-425)

### **“The Day the Singer Fell”**

The first narrative of the collection, “The Day the Singer Fell”, stands out because it is the opening story of the composite, giving it the privilege of setting the thematic tone and mood for the following stories. Secondly, it is the only story which has clearly negative connotations, the “fall” implying physical failure, the biblical lost grace, or personal broken dream(s). The story is also the only to feature an African American protagonist. Several other stories in *On the Line* feature immigrant protagonists (first, second, or even possibly third generation), but it is only LeRoy who stands out as non-white. LeRoy is also the only protagonist whose pride and manhood appears to be based on other characteristics than physical strength or his ability to work.

The first page of “The Day the Singer Fell” presents the protagonist’s background. This includes a brief description of his parents, and what traits he inherited from them. From the onset of the story, boundaries of existence the protagonist will face have been implied. Firstly, as a mulatto, the protagonist would face a twofold exclusion; racial exclusion as a result of his ethnicity, and homosocial emasculation as non-white, and therefore by the definition of his time, “unmanly”. Despite his physically imposing features, being “tall, stern, and enormously powerful”, traits that are likely to be described as “manly”, his father spent his life as a servant waiting tables. This father is also described as having “carefully buried” his self-respect, and as being (in comparison to LeRoy) forced to be smiling and polite because of “painfully acquired obsequiousness” (10). Further, when he “began to fade away

before [LeRoy's] eyes", he is "betrayed" by his brothers in arms, as his lung cancer is "not listed by the Navy as a service-connected disability" (4). LeRoy's father was, in short, an emasculated father figure.

In spite of this, LeRoy is described as inheriting this self respect "openly" (3). Swados' portrayal of this unnamed man is culturally significant as it protests the treatment of African American men as unable to achieve inherent "manhood". A decade before the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike of 1968, where black men carried signs declaring "I AM A MAN" (Stanford), Swados exemplifies the accomplishments of a marginalized masculinity in the terms most important for *his* contemporaries. As LeRoy grows up partially educated, physically strong, confident, and heterosexual, one *could* say that his father succeeded in establishing, within the frame of *his time*, a strong "manhood" *despite* the limitations undoubtedly put on him by society. The significance of Swados' protest is twofold. Firstly it demonstrates, in terms that were important in his contemporary society, that an African American man could be a father like any other, and achieve masculinity through the same means as a Caucasian male. Secondly, and perhaps at first glance, oppositely, Swados' presentation of LeRoy's father comes across as a critique of the simplistic heterosexist ideology of his time. This second level of critique makes the terms that were defining Swados' contemporary paternal masculinity seem superficial and unfulfilling. The accomplishments or privileges of LeRoy, being partially educated, physically imposing, and capable of producing offspring should not be the basis for his father's happiness.

However emasculated LeRoy's father was at work, or in the public sphere, he and his wife still provided for their son as "they had managed to give LeRoy two and a half years at Hampton Institute" (3). Hampton Institute, also known as the Hampton Norman School, was founded in 1863 by General Butler as the Butler School for Negro Children "where students were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and grammar, as well as various housekeeping skills" (Hampton). Hampton Institute, a name adopted on July 1, 1930, was, and became an important part of the Civil Rights Movement, employing both famous Rosa Parks, and being visited by noted civil rights leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is therefore in this mid-1950s budding Civil Rights melting pot, that the protagonist of "The Day the Singer Fell" finds himself.

The fact that the Hampton Institute was at the time primarily concerned with educating black men can give rise to various interpretations of LeRoy's personality. Firstly, one can

speculate whether or not a homosocial setting amongst his fellow African American men nurtured a naiveté towards the emasculation his father experienced. Secondly, and oppositely, being surrounded by other black men in an academic setting can signify that LeRoy inhibits a greater understanding of, and confidence in, the masculinity of his ethnicity. This ambiguity is not thoroughly resolved within the frame of the story, as there are few characters whose description includes their reaction, or rather explicitly, their lack of reaction towards his ethnicity. LeRoy's fellow hook-man Kevin, for instance, "could not understand why it was that Americans seemed only amused by Negroes, or disgusted by them, when to him the black man [...] was a creature of wonder" (15). The narrator also describes LeRoy's astonishment at the two anonymous "wisecracking Northern white boys" who "scarcely seemed to notice the fact that he and Teddy were Negroes", and how this was a "far stranger experience than the huge new factory itself" (7). LeRoy's masculinity is presented by the author in a way that provokes the question *why* the protagonist should, and why we as readers should, find his ethnicity significant. In comparison to the technological advancements and accomplishments of industrious human beings, the color of a person's skin should be immaterial. Nevertheless, it is necessarily so that LeRoy's ethnicity is of thematic importance, if only because it argues that it *should* be unimportant. For example we find that the reader is introduced to LeRoy's father as a mulatto on the first page, but that the color of LeRoy's skin is not explicitly mentioned until page seven. The impression that ethnic background should be insignificant to the reader is further enhanced by the fact that it appears to be no limiting factor, nor of any concern, to LeRoy himself. As limiting factors go, there are other masculine features that become problematic for LeRoy, despite being physically "big", "powerful", and having "more muscles than you ever heard of" (3, 14, 6). Given that *On the Line* is a book mainly about the inhumanity of factory work and the ill treatment of the working class according by Nelson Lichtenstein, the environment of the factory itself is not prominent in "The Day the Singer Fell". The factory is described more in other stories from *On the Line*. The assembly line itself has often been depicted as a site of humiliation and alienation, in which the worker is "turned into a machine to serve omnivorous cannibalistic machines" (Kimmel 144). This gives credence to a reading in which the humanity of the (male) protagonist is center stage, and more important than his role as a member of the working class.

The substantial part of the story is dedicated to fleshing out and portraying the personality and inner psyche of LeRoy. The opening scene of the story presents the reader with a protagonist that is "easygoing, but prideful [...] never one to look for trouble but sure



of what he wanted from life” (3). The idea that LeRoy is generally positive is further enhanced when his father dies, and he can no longer afford to attend Hampton Institute. The implications are double. On one hand, we can read his positive outlook as proof of confidence and dedication that will inevitably lead to success, or alternatively, a case of naiveté and immaturity, as he comes across as oblivious to the challenges he is bound to face. These challenges present themselves soon enough, as LeRoy writes home to his mother. He is torn three ways between being the dutiful son that sends home a check to his widowed mother; not working so much he will be unable to study music; and his responsibility towards his girlfriend Lily (5). As he is torn three ways, he faces three problems: The first problem challenges his role as the dutiful son, the man he has become, and by extension of that, the masculinity and manhood of the father that raised him. In this sense, despite the solid upbringing his father (and mother) gave him, the ghost of his familiar patriarch hangs over him, dictating his future. The second problem challenges his dream and his autonomy (and, as argued below, his perception of the image of the Self Made Man). The third problem challenges his role as responsible breadwinner. These challenges represent, by type, the topical “problems” that Swados lets the reader consider and their resolution(s) form the centre of the emerging theme. LeRoy’s responses and actions combine to present the reader with his “potency” and “masculinity”.

LeRoy dreams of becoming a professional singer. This aspiration was first introduced to him at Hampton Institute. The reader is not privy to which courses LeRoy had attended (besides sports), however we know that this “vision of power and success” caused him to make life changing choices as he abandons his former education in favor of music and language (4). Similarly, LeRoy decides to leave Virginia and travel to New York in hope of realizing his ambition. When he, sometime later, applies for the factory job, it is with the consideration that it is “real money, enough to take care of regular voice lessons, and of Lily, whose baby was already growing within her” (6). His obligation towards his fiancée is added almost as an afterthought, as he is torn between his aspirations as his personal priority, and his societal obligations towards his significant other. His dream is, by all accounts, all consuming, but cannot relieve him from responsibility. This obsession defines LeRoy, as he explicitly puts it in conversation with Kevin: “Every man ought to have an aim. Maybe in your country it’s different, but here you’re nothing without an aim” (15). Because of this sole focus is his “vision of power and success”, LeRoy’s dark moments become even more frightening to him, as he ponders life without an aim (4). Because he *expects*, rather than

hopes, we find that his mental condition at any time in the story is linked to his confidence that his dream can be fulfilled. This confidence fluctuates between opposing strong and weak states almost to the point of bipolarity. At times this confidence is so low that the protagonist descends into despair, feeling isolated, lonely, and frustrated that there is nobody at the factory “in whom he could confide, no one with whom he could drop what was developing into his LeRoy-the-Nut act [...]” (8). This “LeRoy-the-Nut” façade is a construct, an outward personality, that hides his insecurities and allows him to deflect homosocial criticism. LeRoy expects that his inclination to sing while working, and aspiring to become a professional singer, comes across as emasculating. Thus he erects a second, outward persona to shield himself from oppressive reactions, sheltering himself from those around him. This exclusion even includes his wife Lily, with whom he discusses a wide range of other personal topics (10).

This unique distance is not unique to the character’s experience of bliss and despair, as his apparent self chosen social alienation is another inherent polarity. He is “eager” to be friends with everyone, yet hides his frustration, and wants “badly to be completely free from outside involvement with the men on the line [...]” (12). Similarly, “[b]ehind his smiling jollity and eagerness to be friends with everyone, LeRoy was often dark with frustration and *impotence*” (7-8, emphasis mine). This social alienation, this exclusion by choice, is confirmed when the reader is being explicitly told that LeRoy has been “*satisfied* to have them think of him as *queer* and comical, a bellowing buffoon who could hardly be growing into a responsible family man” (17, emphasis mine). LeRoy is apparently unconcerned (satisfied) with that his fellow workers question his sexuality, and doubt his sanity. Again, as before, interpretations range from the confident to the naïve, as we ponder whether or not these aspects of the protagonist are strengths or weaknesses. The questions can be partially answered by close reading of the few occasions of direct interaction with the Irish immigrant worker Kevin. After developing something of a homosocial relation with Kevin, LeRoy refers to him as “boy”. The details of the age of both himself and Kevin are undisclosed, and today, the use of the word “boy” is largely unproblematic, or even designates familiarity, but the ethnicity of LeRoy, and the time of publication, makes the use significant. Both before and after slavery, the term “boy” was used by white males to designate black men as inferior to white, in terms of mental, physical, and spiritual development. The term designated exclusion, as it claimed manhood to be solely a white-male sphere, and also indicate that black males would never be able to attain the traits that defined manhood (Nittle). LeRoy’s use of the

word “boy” can indicated, if one adopts his perspective as naïve, an unawareness of the implications of racial emasculation. Alternatively, he is so accustomed to it that the implications are of no concern to him. Either way, Swados’ use of “boy” as a signifier highlights both the unfair treatment of Kevin, by LeRoy, and by extension the problematic masculinity of all men. It could also be a sign of a dichotomy between the masculine ideals of physique versus refinement and education. In conversation with Kevin, the reader is privy to LeRoy’s lack of real world knowledge. When questioned by Kevin if he can “just” audition for the Metropolitan Opera “[j]ust like that? An ordinary workingman, they’ll pick you to stand up before that microphone and perform for the delight of million?”, he responds with “Well, I understand you got to be recommended” (16). The Metropolitan Opera began sponsoring its first auditions in 1935, however it was not until 1955, only two years prior to the publication of *On the Line*, that the first African American singer was hired (Metropolitan Opera). LeRoy’s use of the word “understand” implies a lack of certainty and knowledge that does not reflect his earlier confidence and dedication towards his chosen goal.

The accident that eventually cripples LeRoy can be argued is a result of his preoccupation with his daydreams. Injuring himself, he spends several weeks at the hospital, and he returns to the factory as polite as ever, but also cold, unsmiling and uncaring. The last pages of the story, the narrative post-accident are open to various interpretations and meanings. Firstly, if we interpret the protagonist as, up to this point, naïve and childish, the most obvious change is how LeRoy’s self-delusion is dispelled. Considering the singularity of his vision as weakness allows LeRoy to consider a more objective form of reality; before the accident his artistic career goals seemed more important than his obligations to Lily. As she visits him LeRoy in the hospital, he begs her to be careful: “We’re not kids any more, we’re raising a family. You be careful and don’t slip on the way home, you hear? We lose one thing, let’s not lose another” (20).

LeRoy’s acceptance of his situation as he comes back to the factory post hospitalization goes hand in hand with this maturity. When Kevin approaches him on his first day back, LeRoy indicates that in hindsight, his aspirations were unrealistic: “Sometimes when you ride too high you know you’re going to fall” (21). Secondly, with the termination of his aspirations to become a musician, the behavior that set him aside from the other men at the factory is gone. One cannot assume that he continues to work at the factory forever, but we are given information that he “never sang again” (22). Because he “never sang again,” there is no

reason for the other workers to wonder about, as they did before, his sanity or his sexuality, and there is no need for him to be “satisfied to have them think of him as queer and comical” (17).

LeRoy did not, according to himself, care how the other workers perceived him before the accident. On a superficial level, one can argue that there is validity in considering LeRoy’s accident as a rebirth, not only as a family man, but as a man among men. In the mid-twentieth century, various educational theories proposed gender identification, where young men and boys were encouraged to pursue more manly activities. Under this paradigm, LeRoy’s previously stated physical strength and normatively masculine track record would no longer be overshadowed by what would be considered an unmanly trait. However, “The Day the Singer Fell” comes across as a brilliant criticism of the preoccupation with and fear of young men turning effeminate. This fear produced schools of thought that advocated prohibiting men from “reading, painting, cooking, or listening to classical music” regardless of individual preferences (Kimmel 137). LeRoy’s accident can, if one adopts the viewpoint of an advocate for oppressive patriarchal gender policing, be seen as the purging of an unfavorable male trait. What Swados does, however, is to allow the reader to appreciate LeRoy’s despair as an echo of the countless of thousands of men who undoubtedly felt (and still feel) like he did: oppressed. Swados lets the reader partake in the tragic irony that portrays the removal of that which made LeRoy unique, but also an anomaly, as an “escape” from homosocial alienation. Returning to the factory, LeRoy is no longer an outsider. The foreman asks how he fares and “[o]ne of the old-timers came up and said, ‘Welcome back’” (20-21). Only by conforming and by being reduced to a non-effeminate stereotype can LeRoy be included in the male social sphere.

After the antithesis of his accident, LeRoy is forced to reconcile with the new territory of his existence. Lily and his unborn child become his primary focus and his reason to continue to go back to the factory. Kimmel states that one of the big questions of the time was how men could “remain responsible breadwinners [...] devoted fathers – to make sure that their sons did not become sissies – and not turn into wimps themselves” (156-157). The assumption is that fatherly responsibility centers on the prospect of raising a masculine son. One possibility for LeRoy, then, to reclaim a sense of manhood is dependant on whether or not his unborn child is male or female. With the basis upon which he created his own sense of potency dismantled, he is left with society’s norms and perceptions; a man could “be a

success as a father, a real ‘dad’ if he cares enough to try” (Elaine Taylor May qtd. in Kimmel 163). However, as the masculine and feminine spheres were still socially segregated, Swados leaves only one hope for LeRoy, as his “success as a father” hinges solely on having a son to father.

### **“Fawn, With a Bit of Green”**

“Fawn, With a Bit of Green” is the second story of Swados’ composite *On the Line*. Kevin, the protagonist, is first introduced in the first story “The Day the Singer Fell”. Interactions with LeRoy presented to the reader a man whose personality was the polar opposite of LeRoy’s; a man without a façade, whose gaze was marveling, and whose emotions “lay as open on his face as his national origin and his character” (15). As with the African American protagonist in the first short story, the background of Kevin is an important point of scrutiny. Being Irish, the stereotype of his nationality must be taken into account, both from an historical context, and as a point of social criticism presented by the author. Throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the Irish stereotype was remarkably similar to that of African Americans; Irish were lazy, immoral, and destructive (Sharp). The Irish were subject to ridicule in political cartoons as apeline and destructive drunkards, and some even classified the Irish as “Blacks, not Whites.” It was not uncommon for Irish job applicants to be told that “No Irish Need Apply” (Haug). After the turn of the century, working Irish eventually found themselves better off as second-generation skilled workers. Their common laborer status jobs were filled by southern and eastern European immigrants (Immigration). It is important to note that Kevin, as a first generation “fresh off the boat” immigrant, displays none of the stereotypical Irish behavioral traits. The only trope that it can be argued that he has, is that of “stupidity”, although in the more specific sense of childish naiveté rather than lack of intelligence; Kevin feels numbed “by the sophistication of the men with whom he worked, even the Negroes from the Southern farms, who, he was sure, had had less schooling than he” (26). Since naiveté can hardly be claimed to be uniquely Irish, and a sense of wonder being even more universal, the nature of Kevin’s Irish descent can become an important criticism of xenophobic pigeonholing by virtue of its irrelevance to the actual events in “Fawn, With a Bit of Green”.

The first pages of “Fawn, With a Bit of Green” emphasize Kevin’s naiveté and childlike wonder. While his fellow applicants spout cynicism and complaints, Kevin finds his employment at the automobile factory a “child’s ticket” to an “awesome half-believed-in

fairyland” (23). Kevin’s marvels romanticize descriptions of the factory and the work being performed there: “Giant silver vans were disgorging cast-iron and aluminum parts”, the newborn automobiles were decorated with “glittering chrome ornamentation”, and like knights errant marching past fairytale peasants they “filed in stately procession past the seemingly humble and dirty workers” (25). This adolescent fascination is emphasized, as Kevin becomes lost on his first day and wonders how one could ever find one’s way around “this Arabian Nights, this extravaganza of noise, color and smell” (26). These boylike perceptions and the lack of mature masculine personality traits in Kevin are further showcased when he, unlike his fellow workers, faints upon seeing LeRoy hurt. In the weeks that follow, Kevin finds himself troubled by shame. This period is presented as one of “reevaluation” (29). He considers his colleagues’ cynicism, their distaste for the work they are performing, and how they make a living, and he decides that he, too, should have ambition. Up to this point there have been no signs of the protagonist considering the future beyond his weekly pay check. As this change, it can be read as the beginning of a maturing phase of Kevin’s life, or, alternatively, as the beginning of indoctrination that dismantles his positive outlook; maturity, in this sense, comes at the cost of enjoyment, and at the cost of personal freedom of expression.

Confiding in Walter, a young boy ten years his junior, the reader finds Kevin’s physique and naiveté counterpointed against Walter’s strenuous toil and quick wit. Their conversations reveal to Kevin the world of finances, and give birth to Kevin’s ambition to become an automobile owner. This interest lends itself to a renewed interest in the factory, as Kevin recognizes the process of creating an automobile. Ambition, however, also gives birth to the first signs of egocentrism, as Kevin stops wondering why his fellow workers despise their work, and instead start to consider them “ignorant profane laborers, exhausting themselves without knowing why” (36). Once the car is in his possession, Kevin finds himself confident that at last he has “become an American” (37). This portrayal of ambition and egocentrism serve to demonstrate that even the kindest and most likeable character is prone to subverting his own empathy in favor of personal gain. The honesty and emotions that Kevin displayed “as open on his face as his national origin and his character” are replaced by foul words and meaningless factory curses (15, 26). As the car loses its fresh grandeur, and the fleeting moment of being center of attention at his favorite pub passes, the car as a symbol of prosperity becomes a symbol of corruption, or twisted dreams. Kevin’s antithesis occurs as he realizes his misplaced enthusiasm. In achieving his ambitions of owning a motor vehicle, he

finds himself changed. The factory, and by extension of that, the world, no longer holds any wonder for him, and he feels bored and annoyed with his work. His previous boyish perceptions are replaced by cynicism and doubt. The result is a “bitter clarity,” as he realizes how he would be “chained to the line for years, chained to the drudgery, the monotony, the grinding labor” as a slave to consumerism (40). The loan he took to purchase his automobile would not be paid down until after his car itself had lost any value, and would have to be replaced by a new one. As his car literally become tarnished and dirtied, so does its symbolism of consumerist ambition. As a symbol of freedom, the car has instead become a vehicle for the realization that no one is free. Not only does Swados criticize cynicism, and warn us of the danger of the lure of consumerism, but more importantly, he warns us that consumerism as a basis for masculinity, or manhood, is inherently dangerous. As Kevin asks himself whether he is a proper American, the warning is emphatically stated to the reader; beware he who defines himself by the contents of his purse, rather than the character of his heart.

Swados also presents other warnings to the reader in the guise of Kevin’s tragic lack of self-awareness. He is, in a sense, deserving of the condescending “boy” that was levied at him by LeRoy in “The Day the Singer Fell”, and he is embarrassingly aware of it (13). In the colloquial ironic sense, it is Kevin’s awareness of his lack of sophistication that inhibits his growing understanding of the reality that surrounds him. Feeling that his questions about the “wonders of this dreamlike factory must sound silly even to someone as sympathetic as LeRoy”, Kevin keeps his thoughts to himself (26). Unwilling, or unable, to overcome this feeling of foolishness, there are no lessons for Kevin to learn from the men around him, and the only open route towards maturity, or more importantly, an adult masculine sense of self, is through trial and painful error.

It is prudent, however, to consider Kevin’s reaction(s) in lieu of his budding maturity. He decides to sell his car and return to Ireland. The implications are threefold. Firstly and perhaps most importantly, is the fulfillment of antithesis, as the protagonist is forced to reconcile with, and familiarize himself with, his new self. It is unlikely that he will be able to experience the marvel of childish innocence again. Secondly, we note that the narrator presents no termination of the romance between Kevin and Peggy, and that Kevin, within the context of the story, simply leaves. This can be taken as a sign that Kevin realizes that their relationship was purely superficial, and that, possibly, Peggy’s interest was born of

materialistic values. Alternatively, and more likely, it can be taken as a sign of Kevin's maturity and cynicism, where he, having "matured" during the course of his factory employment, is no longer interested in the adolescent romancing of his past. Finally, we can appreciate the ambiguity of the open-ended termination of the text. On one hand it is possible to consider Kevin an emasculated coward who runs away from a reality that his disturbing epiphany has revealed, unable or unwilling to accept that the price he must pay for prosperity in America is the chains of responsibility. On the other hand, it is entirely possible to perceive the protagonists' final actions not as the coward's flight in the face of difficulty, but as bravery in the form of autonomy: Kevin chooses to accept the "dull and stagnant" nature of his home town in exchange for the personal freedom he would sacrifice if he stayed in America.

If one considers a return to Ireland to, presumably, continue teaching, as the brave choice, it also presents Kevin with other challenges. In conversation with Walter, Kevin revealed that he was uncomfortable teaching, because of the heavy handed clergy (30). If one assumes that Kevin returns to teaching, he would be under the authority of the parish, and effectively be just another cog in another type of machinery. The reader is free to speculate what fate has in store for Kevin, but it appears that he will become a slave in one way or another. The only difference lies in what devil you choose to serve. Swados presents, in "Fawn, With a Bit of Green" a short story *Bildungsroman*, portraying mid twentieth-century masculine maturity as offering little choice but to accept emasculation in one form or another. Painting a bleak picture of the problems and lack of answers mid-century modernity has in store for men, as either a slave to consumerism, monotony, or authority, Swados warns us profoundly against the dangers of apathy and objectification of our fellow man.

### **"Joe, the Vanishing American"**

The third short story of *On the Line* introduces the reader to Walter, the only protagonist who is arguably still a boy rather than a man. Walter, who just graduated, still lives at home with his mother and father and goes to work at the automobile factory to save money for college. For Walter there is no pre-existing, well defined sense of manhood to be lost. The significance is that the story deals with how a young man can find a sense of belonging, purpose, and masculinity, and how he can deal with paternal disappointment and rejection, both from his literal father, and from the other men at the factory.



Walter's background and family setting is described in the introductory pages of the story. His father, a downwardly mobile former district sales manager is now a ground floor clerk in a branch office; his mother clinging desperately to the bygone glories of their former middle-class existence. Walter himself is described as having "never done anything harder than shovel the neighbors' snowy driveways" (43). Without and money for post high school education, Walter decides, in a display of impressive aptitude for responsibility, to apply for a job at the local automobile factory. The response from his parents ranges from his mother's shock "at the way he *looked*, not at how he must have *felt*", through reassurance that he can pretend to not wear greasy overalls, to his fathers' resigned insistence that "there's no shame attached to factory work any more" (44-45). The passive-aggressive parental reaction to Walter's choice of going to work at eighteen stems from both fear and shame, as they have "not been able to send him away to college" (45).

If one keeps the paternal advice in mind, the words of Walter's father ring hollow when compared to the description of Walter's experiences with work at the factory: "nightmare of endless horror", "unremitting anguish", "monotonous", "stupefying", and "exhausting" are but some of the words used to describe the automobile plant. Despite the monotony and back breaking demands of the assembly line, it becomes clear that what Walter fears is the judgmental attitude of the factory foremen, as they audit both performance and precision and hold every man up to an invisible company standard. Not unlike other invisible normative standards of behavior, the young man finds the guidelines he is demanded to adhere to fleeting and incomprehensive. The scolding he receives from Buster the foreman demonstrates the crux of the situation with clarity: "You call yourself a metal *man*?" (48, emphasis mine). Despite the harsh treatment he receives from his superiors, we find that Walter shows strength of character and a willingness to strive to keep his head above the water, as he would "hurl himself at the job [...] filing away with a clumsy fury" (48). This "clumsy fury" is coupled with clarity of mind that makes Walter, despite his young age, stand out amongst the other protagonists of *On the Line*, as his remarks, comments, questions, and intellectual participation in conversation with the other workers highlights the dichotomy between his clear headedness and his lack of worldly experience. In a sense, Walter is the epitome of young male potential: compassionate and intelligent, with an attitude of acceptance when it comes to getting your hands dirty, but lacking in guidance and without a hierarchal father figure ready to teach him how to become a "man".

As Walter familiarizes himself with the other men at the factory, he observes a wide range of personalities, from the companionable Kevin, to the cynics who reveal the most poignant of intimacies in the most offhand of comments, impressing onto the young boy the diversity of the masculine sociality. Despite his joviality and “friendly overtures”, he gets miserable treatment from some of the older men, Pop first among them, accusing Walter of being neither “steady” nor “reliable” (54). The irony of Pop’s accusations will be further discussed in the chapter dealing with Pop’s reasons to be bitter, “A Present for the Boy”, however his unfair barrage against Walter reveals its own fallacy: “I [have] seen a million like you. Not steady, not reliable, don’t want to learn, just out for fun. You’ll never make a metal *man*” (54). The prejudice of Pop’s assault is clear. The assumption that Walter is there for fun, that he endures working condition he earlier described as a “nightmare of endless horror” comes across as an insult to the challenges the young man overcomes, but the inference that young men are uninterested in learning is brilliantly juxtaposed with the older men’s lack of willingness to teach.

The offhand treatment of Walter as an inexperienced adolescent change with the introduction of Joe, “the gray-haired cynic whom everyone liked but no one seemed to know.” With his laconic attitude, Joe treats Walter like no one has treated him before: with understanding. Joe becomes the focal point of a criticism of contemporary lack of solidarity amongst not only workers, but any group of men. Embodying the qualities of Rotundo’s “existential hero”<sup>5</sup> Joe, in a series of episodes where his character “remain[s] aloof, insubstantial as a ghost” (juxtaposed nicely against the firm quality of compassion and advice), advocates how it might serve a better end to “actually show [Walter] how to do it” and provide Walter with the proper tools (Rotundo 286; Swados 58, 50-51). The way Joe treats Walter serves to show Walter the multifaceted and intricate meanings of the other men’s cynicism, giving Joe the role of wise patriarch for both young Walter and for the reader.

As the other characters slowly start to turn a treat Walter like an equal, and share in their stories and philosophies, we find that Joe is there, always ready to expand on their musings, to nurture a greater understanding and empathy in Walter. When a young inspector offers some personal advice to Walter, Joe is there to ensure our protagonist that despite the cynicism and harsh words of the other men, their stories should not be discarded without

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<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, Joe exhibits no evidence of any “wariness of women”

afterthought. As he listens to the other men, Walter gets the feeling that the factory is a prison, and that he is “doing time and [is] told that [his] sentence might turn out to be indefinite” (57). Regardless, Joe insists, he must not consider himself apart from the other men, and must not discard neither their humanity nor his own: “Don’t you think somebody like that inspector had his ambitions?” Joe asks, “his man’s pride? Did you ever figure the cost of the job in terms of what it does to the personality of a clever, intelligent fellow like him?” with the implied suggestion that Walter, too, is a clever, intelligent fellow (57-58). As Walter grows to understand the importance of compassion, so does Swados allow the reader to empathize with these desolate men. Swados presents through Walter’s compatriots an eerie perception of the harshness of reality, and warns both young Walter, and importantly us as readers, that “[n]o one who comes [to the factory] wants to admit that the place has any connection with his real life” (59).

It is the problematic nature of this connection that Swados exposes, as he advocates a reconsideration of the humanity behind not only consumerism, but intra-personal relationships amongst equals: “That is why I hope you,” referring to Walter, “won’t forget what it was like for the people who made the things you’ll be buying;” and “Never mind the machinery. Remember the men. The men make the machines, and they make their own tragedies too” (61, 62). Do not forget, Swados seems to plead, the mistreatment you received at the hands of unfair, prejudiced, and uncaring men, so you remember to never treat without compassion those who have, like you did, done nothing to attract apathy and animosity. In the guise of Walter, Swados beseeches us to wonder “how many people feel that way” (67). The answer, naturally, is “more than you can count” (67).

Despite the firmness of the Joe’s teachings, and the burgeoning philosophical capacity of Walter, the reader finds the greatest lesson yet to come. Explicitly stated, we learn that Walter “fought hard against the influence of the older man, whose [...] subversive outlook was so foreign [...] but he was forced to admit [that] he was seeing the factory through Joe’s cold, discerning eyes”, prompting Walter to fear that if “Joe were ever to leave, the plant would have no real existence other than as a money-producing nightmare” (65). The decisive point of Swados criticism against established patriarchal systems of apathy and prejudice is not simply advocating the considerable importance of an appreciation of both humanity and solidarity, but rather that even this indoctrination can be dangerous. When Walter broaches the subject to Joe, exclaiming that “I don’t know what I would have done here without you,”

we find Joe's face darkening. The subsequent morning, Joe has vanished. Returning a few days later, Joe quits his job and, giving his farewells to Walter, asserts that "You'll make out all right, no matter what you do. I don't even have to wish you good luck" (69).

Through Walter's panic we learn, and Walter learns, that he has matured more than first expected. As his mentor disappears as quickly as he appeared, Walter recognizes that it is time to seek answers for himself, rather than to simply rely on the wisdom of others. This is also what Joe realizes, as he recognizes Walter's dependence on him as unhealthy and adolescent. In the sense that the "Vanishing American" was a man who recognized the importance of self-sacrifice, as opposed to the sacrifice of the symbolic and literal sons, we find that Joe chooses, unlike Abraham, to represent the confident safety of the loving father, while at the same time approving of his Isaac's need to find self-confidence. Departing, Joe leaves the future to Walter, not out of abandonment, but as a display of faith in the younger generation. On the superficial level, "Joe, the Vanishing American" is a story of a spoiled middle class kid who admiringly picks himself up in the face of challenges, gaining trust and confidence in his abilities. A masculine close reading reveals the intricate mechanics of the author's criticism of the father-son relationship, and the responsibility we all have for teaching our metaphorical sons solidarity, confidence, and independence.

### **"A Present for the Boy"**

Everywhere, in all male-dominated spheres of life, Swados asserts, from "bomber bases" to "baseball clubhouses, at firehouse pinochle tables and in logging camps [there is] one man known as Pop" (71). In "A Present for the Boy", proverbial "Pop" is "Casimir Sczystafkiewicz", also introduced in "Joe, the Vanishing American", the older man with his "foaming shock of white hair [that gives] him a certain dignity" (91, 71). Pop is presented as a down to earth and humble man, who was working on the line when his current bosses were fresh-faced youngsters, and who has earned his position of responsibility based on his fairness. Small of stature, his other capacities, such as his worker's pride, his "irreplaceable kind of experience", and his eyesight form the foundation of a confidence that refuses to be subject to muscular-masculine standards (78). At the same time, Pop distances himself from institutional authority, both in the unions and at the factory, as he claims his "modesty, coupled with a native shrewdness that would *not allow him simply to be used* by those who were more educated than he, earned him popularity if it limited his future (73, emphasis mine).

Pop has overcome great challenges in his life, the economic hardships of the Great Depression, and a wife that “was too long in dying” from “the malignancy [of cancer] that swept through her system like a creeping rot” (75, 74). As his wife died, he “did not even feel guilty at the sigh [of relief], for he knew that he had done everything that a husband should” (76). And while this was, for all intents and purposes, technically true, it is this concept of the “technically true” that defines Pop, and that causes his outward stoicism to subvert his inner agony.

Rudy is “the one human being whom [Pop] adored”, a son whom he observed “minutely at the breakfast table and over the dinner dishes”; and sometimes “tiptoed in to watch the young athlete sleeping the sleep of the innocent” (77). Because of his son, Pop considers himself “the luckiest man in the world, to live quietly and at peace and to even share an occasional confidence with this beautiful boy” (78). The inner turmoil his stoicism camouflages is exemplified in Pop’s dwarfed emotional life. As he lives his private life controlled by one institution after another, first the bank as he struggled to pay the mortgage on his house, then the hospital as his wife lay terminally ill, and then further into the uncertain demands of the future, Pop knows very little about even the human being he holds dearest in his life: “Pop knew very little about [Rudy] or his dreams, if he had any”, and the description of Rudy’s ignorance of his father’s loneliness as he spends his evenings out of the house, speaks volumes about Pop’s fear of emotional attachment (77). It is undoubtedly so that Pop loves Rudy dearly, but is incapable of expressing his fondness directly. Instead, he decides to show Rudy how much he loves him by a circular route: He decides to buy Rudy a muscle car, right off the assembly line.

Pop considers the other young faces at the factory, and how many of the boys, “especially the tall ones and those with athletic sweaters and crewcut hair”, remind him of “his” Rudy (79). The fear Pop expresses as he contemplates the unthinkable, that his precious son would “betray him” and be “satisfied to become a grinder or a buffer or a welder or a metal finisher on the assembly line” is astonishing. The *pater familias* is so agitated at the thought that his heir would become no better than himself, revealing a self-loathing that is at variance with the explicit confidence and worker’s honor presented just a few pages earlier. The internalized self-loathing is affirmed in conversation with the hard-working Orrin. As Pop praises his own generation’s work ethic, he reveals a condemnatory attitude towards the younger workers. Orrin becomes the agent that uncovers the hypocrisy of Pop’s refusal to

bring his “own son in here for a job” (85). Orrin continues to point out how Walter (of “Joe, the Vanishing American”), while willing, and unskilled, deserves credit for “the old college try [as] he’s saving up to go away to school” (87). Orrin’s malicious implication is that Walter, to whom Pop has earlier displayed such a vehemently negative attitude, embodies qualities that Pop presumably admires and that his son does not have. The result of being categorically made aware of his hypocrisy is a further enhancement of the mental barriers Pop hides behind. Pop convinces himself that “Orrin and Louis and all the rest of them, young and old alike, were jealous” (87,). As Pop is unwilling to, or unable to, consider that his precious Rudy might be incapable of “sweat[ing] it out for a year or two” in order to go to college, a consideration that would question his son’s qualities compared to the fumbling Walter, he reinforces the idea that Walter’s personality is barren.

The epitome of Pop’s defensiveness and hypocrisy is revealed in the aftermath of his son’s car accident. On the Saturday night after his graduation, Rudy is out driving his automobile, and Pop, trying to dispel his tension with alcohol, dozes off in anticipation of Rudy pulling up to the curb. Instead, Pop is “awakened by the shrill people of the front doorbell [as] [i]t sounded like someone screaming” (90). Being taken to the hospital, Pop is informed that his son was driving under the influence, and had been “going too fast anyway – and he got rattled and twisted the wheel too hard” (93). As the harshness of reality dawns on Pop, he reacts in telling ways. He goes to work the following day in what can be read as an attempt to continue to emotionally distance himself in much the same way that he (apparently) dealt with his wife’s passing. Stating that “I got to have something to do”, he refuses to take the week off work for his son’s funeral (95). This need to be industrious coupled with his already established inability to form any emotional attachments leaves Pop unable to come to terms with a reality in which he, or his son, is fallible. Continuing to lean on his work ethics as defining his masculinity, he is able to subvert the creeping notion that his affiliation with his son was a weak, distanced, and bought and paid for father and son relationship.

As the question of blame looms larger, Pop degenerates into a bizarre automaton. Just as he reacted with passive apathy to his wife’s cancer, he starts to reason that he cannot be blamed because “a man who worked hard all day didn’t deliberately go out and teach his son wrong things; if Rudy learned wrong, he had learned wrong from his friends, from the movies, not from his father” (97). The self-delusion is staggering, and leads to the conclusion

that Rudy had been “an unworthy son [...] unworthy of his father’s love and trust and admiration” (97). The reader becomes acutely aware of how Pop twists reality to fit his hypocrisy, and how Pop’s disgust for Walter’s “burning ambition to save money and go to college”, and be everything Rudy was not, is juxtaposed with Pop’s earlier self-professed worker’s honor (98). In a final declaration of absurd emotional dislocation, Pop buys a mutt, builds him a “nice home”, or prison, and baptizes the dog “Rudy, in memory of a nice boy. He went away and left me all alone, but now I’ve *got* you, haven’t I?” (101, emphasis mine). As the narrative closes, Pop leaves for work, satisfied that the dog’s leashed obedience leaves the replacement Rudy “where I want you, Rudy [...] waiting when I come home” (102).

“A Present for the Boy” becomes an absurd example of how the sins of the fathers affect the autonomy of the sons. In projecting his fears onto Rudy, Pop only manages to marginalize Rudy’s inner life and feelings, transforming Rudy’s personality into an indistinct and alien entity that cannot have a place in Pop’s subjective reality. The self-loathing of Pop combined with the idolization of his son as a prized possession, an object rather than a person, come together in Pop’s egocentric desire to live vicariously through Rudy. Presenting the reader with Pop’s hypocrisy and inability to come to terms with both reality and the individual, Swados criticizes the lack of and warns us of the importance of empathy and father–son solidarity. As a criticism of his contemporary men’s unwillingness to be, or perhaps inability to be, more than public sphere breadwinners, we find that the private sphere aspects of Pop’s life are nonexistent. This can, “A Present for the Boy” asserts, lead to dangerous objectification, a prime example of which is the cold-blooded dismissal of responsibility, and subsequent replacement of Rudy—with Rudy.

### **“On the Line”**

The fifth story of *On the Line*, sharing the title of the work as a whole, introduces the thirty-three year old father of three, Orrin. Orrin is described as a stubborn man, who takes pride in being called a “fanatic” and whose work is his “religion” (103, 104). The narrative starts *in medias res*, with a ten page nested story to provide background information about Orrin’s past, how he met his wife, and why he is currently at the automobile factory (111-121). The theme of the story centers on Orrin’s perception of masculinity, and the emasculating challenges he faces. These aspects of the narrative affect the protagonist in different ways, as some are to be overcome, while others linger with him constantly throughout the story. There are, in total, four emasculating agents in “On the Line”: First is the relationship Orrin has to

his wife Edith, and his unnamed daughters. Second is his failed business ventures and the lingering effects of them. The third emasculating agent affecting Orrin is that of the severe homosocial alienation he experiences, as he actively excludes himself from his fellow men on the line. Finally, the last, and arguably most prominent emasculating element is that of Orrin's own physique, with all its strengths and weaknesses.

Orrin married Edith, because he was attracted to her intensity and desperately wanted to own her and make love to her, because he could "sense intuitively the depth and ferocity of her response" (112). Conquering Edith becomes proof of Orrin's physical potency and the sexual nature of his endurance, as they "grappled back and forth over tearing sheets, groaning and crying out in ecstasy" (113). However, beyond their youthful intensity there are aspects of their relationship that become a curse for Orrin. Edith is unimpressed with what Orrin himself explicitly states is "the most important thing he had ever done" (108). During the Second World War, Orrin had endured one hundred and seven days in "that French Forest", fighting for his country. Edith's boredom at this tale of valor leaves Orrin emasculated and impotent. Lack of recognition for his role as a soldier leaves Orrin without the masculine characteristic of the warrior or protector. Further, Orrin's relationship with Edith can be read as a stark criticism of the masculine ideal of conquering the feminine. Swados implicitly criticizes the two-dimensionality of the purely sexual relationship. Orrin wanted to conquer and "keep her as his own," but not out of a deep mutual understanding of and respect for values they both deemed important (112). What happiness, the author seems to ask, can there be in not considering your partner your equal?

Orrin and Edith have three children together, all of whom are girls. One of the most important familiar responsibilities for the mid-twentieth century man, outside of his role as the responsible breadwinner, was to father and raise a heterosexual son. With no sons to raise and to pass on his masculinity to, this venue for securing his manhood is also lost to Orrin. In addition to having this path to manhood forever denied to him, it also becomes an active emasculative force in his life: After the birth of their third daughter, Edith biting questions his ability to produce a son: "It's a man's world. I always wished I was a man. Now I can't even have a son"; and "What's the matter? Don't you know how to make boys?" (118). The implications of this venomous accusation are twofold. Firstly, that it *is* a man's world, and that this unfortunately undeniable fact is a major source of unhappiness, and a source of emasculating pressure that no man can control. Secondly, another possible meaning of Edith's



accusations can be read more passionately translated to “If this is a man’s world, why are you not succeeding?” with the added insulting hint that Edith would succeed if *she* was a man. It is clear that this scathing accusation is not intended to provoke the reader into disliking Orrin’s wife, but rather to convey to us that which is Swados criticism: The idea that a man’s happiness, comfort, and confidence would increase, and societal pressure on men to conform to an impossible stereotype decrease, if women were allowed to take part in the public sphere of society; if Orrin was “allowed” to share responsibility for the well-being of his family, and would promote gender equality actively, his wife would be an ally rather than an accusatory agent of gender policing.

The background presented in the nested story reveals that Orrin’s failed business venture, the “Lakeside Service Station & Restaurant,” became a casualty of government transportation restructuring. After the birth of their third and final daughter, Edith expresses her distaste and lack of sympathy for Orrin’s failure, asking him what good a son would do, as he “wouldn’t have anything to pass on to him anyway. Except a bunch of debts” (120). The result leaves the modern father unwanted and alienated from his home, and leads to Orrin expressing his unhappiness, and how he looks forward to going to work more than he does going home (111). Because of the above sentiment, the reader might find it peculiar that, despite Edith’s apparent lack of respect for Orrin’s masculinity, she appears more concerned about his health than he is (123-124).

After the accident and subsequent surgery that leaves Orrin unable to work extra shifts at his second job, he is forced to spend more time idle at home. Edith responds by wanting to “mother him” (according to Orrin) and claims that “it was nice to have him around for a change, and it drove him wild, as if he were already an old man finishing out his life [...]” (113). It is important to note that these are Orrin’s perceptions, that no account is given from Edith’s point of view, and that the narrator refrains from the privilege of omniscience by never allowing Edith to have an opinion. However, to Orrin the mothering nurture of Edith as he faces potential disability might be taken for another sign of her fundamental distrust of his masculinity and physique. To her, Orrin is a short step away from leaving himself unable to continue to provide for those that depend on him. As Orrin put it earlier “he knew absolutely that she was coming to be disappointed in him” (114). Her disappointment is further emphasized when Edith scolds Orrin for having no ambition, questioning him accusingly if he wants to “stay on that assembly line forever”.

Orrin is, in short, presented as an emasculated father figure. It is hard to distinguish between what are actual, genuine, accusations from Edith, and what is Orrin's internalized societal gender normativity. Without insight into Edith's point of view, or thought process, it is hard to define how deep, if any, their love for one another is. However, if we assume that there is genuine caring between this married man and woman, then the reason for their combative behavior towards each other lies in patriarchal limitations, albeit in different areas. As a participant in the public sphere, Orrin is barred from seeking refuge in a home with no future public agent, because all his children are daughters, and, oppositely, as the embodiment of the private sphere, Edith is unable to reach out to Orrin outside the home. Orrin is under "unfair" pressure from his wife to mold his priorities to the dog eat dog world of ambition, under pressure for being unable to produce male offspring, and under siege from his own body, as it protests against the stresses he is putting on it. Being by society the venues needed to have a role in the masculine sphere of the household, there is no answer for him but to accept Edith's criticism and continue to work hard to put bread on the table. This is where Swados' social criticism shines the brightest.

The exclusion and alienation that the protagonist faces is not limited to the home sphere, as he also experiences being rejected by his fellow workers at the factory. Being so immensely proud of his ability to endure and hold off physical exhaustion, Orrin is unable to hide his open contempt for those that complain about the nature of their work. Even though the text presents no reason to believe that the work is anything but brutal, it is important to consider that Orrin purposely ignores, or fails to understand, the significance of turning away this homosocial element of bonding; with work as the common "enemy," it allows the workers to stand united. Refusing this, Orrin stands alone. This is further emphasized by Orrin's recollections and his reminiscence of combat action during the Second World War. Taking pride in himself and his ability to stick it out on *that* line, Orrin remarks that his fellow veterans "resented being reminded of the unpleasant things [they] had only read about in the comfort of their heated barracks" (108). This fixation with bygone glory prompts young Walter to remark to him that "I guess your life hasn't been very interesting since then if you think about the war so much" (111). Orrin draws a line in the sand based on his very subjective opinions, and puts himself on the "right", or "deserving" side of it. Again, as with Kevin in the second narrative of the collection, we can read the story as the author reaching out to the reader to warn us of the consequences of the lack of social, in this case between men, empathy for the individual.

Pride, defensiveness, and defiance regarding his physical abilities poisons Orrin's marriage and isolate him socially, however it is internally that the effects show themselves as both character defining and damning. He always "despised those who were physically his equals or better but who could not keep up with him", and feels contempt for "the big young fellows around him [who whined] about how hard their work was" (104, 105). Orrin's explicit regard for the importance of "endurance and courage" is one that advocates hyper-masculine uniqueness and the ability to overcome challenges other men cannot: "What makes a man unusual, doing something nobody else can do" (107). Similarly, as he defends his zealous adherence to the vision of former combat and glory, he asks Walter "If there's no obstacles, there's no glory, right?" (110). This rhetorical question is composed of the ambiguity of both a tentative search for confirmation and a plea for support and validation. This implicit lack of confidence is at odds with his haughty demeanor and the bile he directs at his fellow factory workers. The result is that Orrin participates in the unhealthy reproduction of the emasculative force that in and of itself also threatens *him* as he faces physical disability. In an attempt to shore up his own masculinity and define his own manhood by excluding those he considers unworthy, he only ends up excluding himself. This delusion is further emphasized when Orrin is adamant in the belief that the masculinity he projects is envied by the other workers (106).

The irony of Orrin's hard line hyper-masculine focus on physical prowess is revealed when he fears the surgery that could relieve him of his pain *and* allow him to continue working like the stallion he believes he is, because it represents "in some indefinable way a threat to the continuity of his life" (126). The most logical interpretation of Orrin's anxiety towards and aversion for surgery, despite the obvious long term benefits, is that a doctor's orders represents a definite undeniable proof that he, Orrin, is fallible. Having spent the majority of his life defining manhood by the ability to sustain hard physical labor or pain, surgery paints a target on his chest, making him the aim of the same persecution he has directed at others.

Returning to the factory, we find that Orrin's pride in his physical ability causes him to make assumptions about the importance of his physical presence, as he wonders "how Buster and the rest were making out without him", a question that is really spurred by the self-scrutinizing "How irreplaceable am I?" (129). Closures force in "On the Line" is, as in the other short stories from *On the Line*, dominated by antithesis, as the protagonist is forced to reconcile with the new territory of his existence. Orrin is no longer able to live according to

the standards he has praised, or the values he has upheld, and the revelation shocks him to his very core. For Orrin, the seed of antithesis is planted when Buster the foreman outright tells him “no matter how well you do it, there’s always somebody around waiting to take over” (135). The multiplicity of the statement should not be lost on the reader. It contains elements that warn both protagonist and reader of the many possible levels of masculine inadequacy ranging from erectile dysfunction to lack of sexual appetite, physical strength, earning ability, and meaningful employment. In his unhappiness and despair at being offered “made work,” Orrin considers that “If I was a kid [...] I’d run away from home” (132, 135). The remark stings with colloquial irony, as it is having his masculinity unmade and being infantilized (or alternatively, made into an old man) that Orrin fears. Complete antithesis occurs when Orrin is being told that without the ability to perform a metal finisher’s job, he will not be compensated with a metal finisher’s pay. The realization that he has been replaced causes the desperate epiphany and the subsequent cry of panic, that he “might as well have worked like all the others all year – nobody cared that I did my best” (137). Orrin’s desperation is immediately countered, as Buster gives him an offer he can’t refuse. Buster challenges Orrin to, in the metaphorical sense, grow up: “You’re not a *kid* to throw away a job just like that, you’re a family *man* (137, emphasis mine). Buster secretly reveals that Orrin is next in line for a job as a foreman on the night shift, adding jokingly that “You’re married a long time, you don’t have to be home at night” (138).

As his physique fails him, Orrin can no longer define his manhood or masculinity based on his physical strength or stamina. Both Buster and Edith have challenged his sexuality by declaring his seed unwanted, unneeded, or deviant from social expectation. Finding the other alternatives unsatisfying, or shameful, he grabs the opportunity to find an escape from emasculation. Edith accused Orrin of lacking manly drive and ambition, as he was satisfied working the line. The sentiment is echoed by Buster, who asks him if he wants to be “working all your life” (138). In this sense, accepting a foreman’s position allows Orrin, regardless of his inner psyche and happiness, to shift his outwardly visible priorities and show his wife that he can indeed be a breadwinner. Signing what he perceives as his “unconditional surrender”, he swallows his pride and admits to physical incapacity (138). Without any sons to “sacrifice”, Orrin becomes both Abraham and Isaac combined, objectifying himself and, ironically, sacrificing his own happiness on the altar which he built to define his own manhood; as an advocate for the muscular-masculine Orrin finds no solace, only defeat, as he becomes unwilling subject to the very charges he levied at other men.

In Orrin, Swados introduces a character drawn between nostalgic and delusional perceptions of masculinity that alienate him from the homosocial setting at work, and causes his marriage to grow sour. The unfolding of the events in “On the Line” forces the protagonist to reconsider his priorities. Regardless of his acceptance of their terms, he finds himself unable to deny the real world effect his delusions have on him. It is easy to consider Orrin a character backed into a corner with no escape, but it is important to note that, while no one considers what Orrin wants, neither does he consider what anyone else wants. His hostile and excluding perception of manhood finally comes around, metaphorically, to bite him in the ass. As much as “On the Line” can be read as a testament to the fear of not fitting in, the pressure to conform to homosocial masculine expectations, it is also a criticism of the danger of self-delusion as well as a statement against complicity in the face of patriarchal, gender oppressive stereotypes. Orrin does not exist in a vacuum and neither does anyone else.

### **“One for the Road”**

The seventh story of *On the Line* introduces a theme that has been absent in the previous stories: alcoholism. “One for the Road” tells the tale of Harold, the alcoholic, who uses the exhausting nature of work to stave off the temptation to go off the wagon and degenerate into an alcoholism that has dominated his life from a very young age. Thirty-nine years old, Harold has suffered economic and social disappointments, lost a career as a commercial artist, become estranged from his wife, and been beaten up by his brothers in law. These details are divulged by the protagonist himself at regular intervals, as he communicates the story of his life to his fellow workers and foremen. These nostalgic moments are often accompanied by the present time Harold’s musings, as he contemplates both his current position and the iron grip of the past.

There are three main elements of importance in “One for the Road”. The first is Harold’s relationship to his father, and the envy Harold felt for the women who appeared in his father’s life as quickly as they disappeared. The second is Harold’s relationship to his wife, the reasons for their marriage, and the way Harold deals with the associated shame. The above aspects are overshadowed by the vividness of Harold’s inability to accept a current and tangible reality. He views both his past and his present through an illusionary veil that juxtaposes the outward honesty and responsibility Harold presents to the other men and the questioning doubts he internalizes.

It is a foreman at the factory that prompts the Harold into divulging the origins of his alcoholism. Having finally worked up the courage to breach the subject, the foreman asks “How’d you get started drinking, Harold?” (143). Harold replies that he has “[b]een drinking since [he] can remember,” that “bootleg booze was always around the house”, and that he can recall being drunk when he “was six or seven years old” (144). Explaining how his father was a hard drinker, Harold shocks the other men on the line by describing how he as early as high school “always had a pint in my locker” (144). Despite this openness, we find that Harold is unable or unwilling to account for the reasons alcohol comforted him. Musing, silently, the reader is given insight into Harold’s relationship, or more explicitly, lack of relationship with a father whose emotional apathy resulted in a young boy who was fell asleep easier if he had “a few drops of burning liquid” in him, if only to avoid laying awake “waiting in vain for someone to tuck him in” (144, 145). As a result of his father’s carousing with strange and unfamiliar women, Harold grew to be jealous of these women as they received the “exclusive attention [...] from Daddy” Harold never got (145).

Be these recollections as they may, Harold is forced to admit to himself that the true “reasons for his drinking were both deeper and shallower”, presenting the first allusion to Harold’s self-preserving delusions. This fleeting perception of reality is also displayed in the way Harold defends his father from Buster’s accusations. Buster, “intent on condemning the monster who could carelessly poison an only son”, shows an understandable standard of compassion for Harold. Who, after all, cannot empathize with a child growing up in such circumstances? Yet Harold defends his dad: “he managed to hold down his job all those years”, and after his death “surprised me [...] He left me ten thousand bucks in cold cash” (146).

Swados presented a criticism of the father-son relationship in “Joe, the Vanishing American”, and “A Present for the Boy.” He elaborates on it from a different viewpoint” in “One for the Road”. Even the loneliness, envy, and agony Harold describes in growing up, coloring a substantial part of his childhood, cannot make Harold condemn even the worst of fathers. The emotionally distant and abusive father is an important role model in his son’s life. As in “A Present for the Boy”, Swados allows the objectification of the son as an impersonal recipient of paternal goods, this time in the guise of money to go to college, become the leash that attaches the son to the father. Unable to provide a functioning private sphere for their sons, both fathers rely on the harvest of a public sphere persona to comfort their heir. In both

cases the (apparently) emotionally barren father attempts to rescue the dysfunctional family through consumerist venues which ultimately leads to disaster: Rudy crashes his muscle car; while Harold goes through college emotionally distant, lonely, and miserable, convinced that he was “never going to be popular as a person”, and as a “lonely orphan” (147). In both cases, the author seems to urge that a father’s emotional participation in the formation of a son’s identity can avert a lifetime of unhappiness.

Harold’s miserable emotional existence is further exhibited in the way he and Marie get married. A mere six weeks after meeting, they marry because “he was terrified of losing her and because Marie felt it would hurt her parents less if she brought home as a husband a pale, underfed Gentile [...] than if they were to discover she had been living in sin” (147). Harold, on one side fears losing of the first person to care for him is again, but is on the other hand turned into an impersonal tool, or an object if you will, as he becomes a safety net for a woman whose emotional attraction to him is second to her fear of her own parents. Admittedly, this perception is only that of Harold, as Marie is not given any opportunity to present her side of the story, but with regard to his inner life and turmoil, this is irrelevant. Marie may have married him because of a profound foundation in love and respect, but if Harold is unable to recognize it, the point is moot. This unclear basis for the marriage is the subject of one of Harold’s own musings. As he considers Marie to have entered into their relationship because “it gave her somebody to feel superior to”, he wonders if these thoughts are an attempt at trying to “evade his guilt at what he had done to the only person who had ever really loved him by stepping on her memory with his heel as he stepped on his own?” (148). The same unclear reflection is presented as Harold declares that Marie metaphorically “asked for it”, as his alcoholism gave her a chance to “mother” and “nurture him” (148, 149). Bemused, Harold finds himself considering “how much of what he had been confiding in the foreman was true,” and how he is “still taking everything out on Marie [...] after all these years” (149). He paints the picture that all the undoubtedly mean and hurtful things he put others through have been secretly wanted by them. As Harold revels in telling the other workers about his past, he takes “pride” in his “ability to strip the past and serve its bare bones *objectively*” (151, emphasis mine). This hypocrisy is exemplified in the way Harold recounts to himself, *not* the other men, how he “street-fought his sobbing wife [...] yelling after her things about Jews that had never occurred to him before” (151). Leaving out the most gruesome details Harold is unable to deal with the weight of reality as it occurred,

casually dismissing questions that come “perilously close to the present”: “Did you finally get divorced?” “Oh no, no [...] I’ll be seeing Marie again one of these days” (153).

The above elements of “One for the Road” are overshadowed by Harold’s inability to deal with the tangible reality of his present condition. Throughout the story, the reader is given an opportunity to appreciate the protagonist’s delusions, as he describes the “suspended state of being” he shares with the other workers in a factory that “had no physical reality” for him (143, 142). It is in this suspension between the vividness of the past and the uncertain hopes of the future, that Harold finds the present reality “receding eerily into infinity” (143). As physical exhaustion frees his mind to daydream, Harold escapes from the unreal setting of the factory, daring to dream of a better existence. Prompted by his increasing fortune in economic, social, and health status, Harold attempts to reach out to his estranged wife, who, after nine months, replies, stating in surprise that she “didn’t think after all these years [he’d] have the guts do what [he’s] doing” (154). Bringing Marie up to date with current events, Harold comes dangerously close to “revealing the unreality of the present [and] exposing the delicate shape of the future” (155). As contact with Marie is reestablished, Harold is free to daydream, but also once again to become dependent on another person, giving birth to renewed doubts about the loyalty and friendship of others. Doubting Marie’s sincerity, Harold reenters a familiar existence of projecting the possibility of failure away from himself and onto third party agents like Marie’s psychologist. At the same time as he admits that “Marie’s letters and his bankbook linked the actual present to any realizable future”, Harold is unable to realize that he considers himself ready to meet his wife, ready to embrace a future he has dreamed of for months, on the basis of external numbers rather than internal maturity and confidence.

Unable to shake the feeling of anxiousness, Harold finds himself disappointed in his colleagues’ lack of reaction when he exclaims that he is seeing his wife the coming weekend. Sitting down at a local diner, Harold finds himself musing on concepts such as age, destination and fate, but a moment’s uncertainty of the concreteness of reality causes him to rummage his wallet, which leads to the discovery of a “blue-and-white identification card, just what you usually find in new wallets” (165). This is what causes the antithesis in “One for the Road”: While Harold has convinced himself that the improvement in his economic, social, and health status have all been a result of an intangible existence in the dream-world of the exhausting factory, he finds out that even the future has been a lie: Marie has not made the



wallet by hand, and the realization that the “private symbols” that “no one else could have recognized” are impersonal and generic, causes Harold’s self-delusion to shatter into a million pieces (155). The fantasies he has leaned on as a replacement for the bottle are revealed to him, as they have been revealed to the reader: The physical strength of the “arm more heavily-muscled than [Marie] had ever known it” is not in accord with the reality of how he has “fattened since going on the wagon” (157, 159). As his illusions begin to crack, he realizes that the one thing that kept him sober at the factory was the line that “demanded [nothing] of him beyond what you could ask of a bullock or an intelligent slave” (163). Future expectations “to act like a *man*”, as opposed to an automaton, hold nothing but terror for him (164). Closing the story, the narrator leaves Harold waiting for a double whiskey and “for the terrible deadly pangs in his insides to come to a tidal climax” (166).

In Harold, Swados presents the inner turmoil of a man who, deserted and sacrificed by his father, in turn deserts and sacrifices those closest to him. In place of a son of his own, the prodigal son estranges his wife, and emotionally distances himself from anyone else who show signs of compassion. Utilizing the concept of ironic self-delusion, Swados allows the reader to read between the lines and be cognizant of the dichotomy between the superficial and the deep protagonist, criticizing both how the aforementioned importance of paternal responsibility can lead to ruin for those unable to come to terms with it, and the inhumane pressure men are under to conform to the demands of being a good father. If only these men, Swados appears to say, could be satisfied with being fathers, instead of “Good Fathers,” their relationship to their sons would improve. Similarly, the concept of the hard-working breadwinner is criticized through Harold’s impermanent adherence to responsible standards, as much as Harold himself is typified as a warning against masculine gender normative expectations.

### **“Just One of the Boys”**

As the title of the short story hints at, “Just one of the Boys” is a depiction of the devastating effect of homosocial alienation and how the lack of solidarity between men can cause personal emotional affliction. In addition to the topic of homosocial alienation, the dehumanizing treatment of others, through both work and ambition, and the lack of appreciation for the job other people does for you, is showcased through the introduction of the protagonist’s wife, and a replacement “hook-man” that is forced to do a two-man job on his own.

“Just one of the Boys” tells the story of the foreman Buster and how he feels “reasonably proud that he had always supported his wife and daughter decently, and had worked up to becoming a foreman without acquiring the reputation of being either a climber or a schemer” (167). This pride is bolstered by Buster’s sense of achievement from having worked since he was fourteen, and having gone on to become a white collar foreman, despite being an “uneducated man” (167). The trials of Buster are presented through three parallel threads of the same story. Firstly, the reader is witness to the breakdown of Buster’s work ethic and fair treatment ideals, and hypocrisy of his attitudes towards the pressure he is put under and the pressure he exerts onto others, as both he and the men under him is pushed past their breaking point. Buster is responsible for the work of those under him, and by virtue of being boss, answerable to his bosses for the quality and quantity of the work his men do. This leaves Buster between the metaphorical rock and a hard place. Secondly, “Just one of the Boys” presents the cold and calculating nature of the soulless corporation in the guise of the engineers and overseers who treat both workers and foremen without compassion. Thirdly, the pride Buster takes in being able to provide decently for his family, his wife and his daughter, never seems to be enough for his ambitious wife.

Buster’s treatment of his workers is in many ways fatherly. He wants the men to “like him, and respect him, and not to fear or mistrust him” (173). His treatment varies between lecturing them for throwing away soldering tin, being frustrated with their indifference to keeping costs down and the quality of their work and giving guidance, as the new men benefit from the wisdom he has accumulated over his years as a factory worker. Nevertheless, his fatherly treatment is, from time to time, confused and objectifying. Longing for the days when he had a “solid core of men”, it is not the quality or camaraderie of his fellow man he pines for, but rather the spread sheet accomplishments of his automaton workers: “there was no longer a solid core of men who [were] ready to work a full day plus as much overtime as would be needed to *hit the production quota*” (170, emphasis mine). His workers are scolded for not knowing “one end of a screwdriver from the other, and are just as apt to walk out at the end of the day and never show up again” (171).

With Buster as agent, the reader is on the one hand given insight into the desperation of responsibility, as it reduces those under you to vessels of your own salvation, and on the other the desire to be friendly and accepted. The guidance and camaraderie Buster displays in one instance, as he jokes and jests with Walter (the young protagonist of “Joe, the Vanishing

American”), causing the young boy to blush, is at odds with the way he offhandedly describes how “new and probationary” workers cannot “bitch to the union” (175).

This inability to properly protect his workers is demonstrated when Buster is forced to bend at the knee to the authority of the engineers and overseers who, in their carelessness, decide that the job LeRoy and Kevin performed in the first two stories of the collection is to be performed by only one man in “Just one of the Boys”. Explaining “formally, ‘Those hooks get heavy’” to the company men, Buster finds his judgment and experience invalidated and overruled (177). This sets in motion a chain reaction that ends in disaster, both for the factory and for Buster. As replacement hook-man is run ragged, Buster finds himself torn between helping the man out by lightening his load, and the reaction Buster has to the “doughy-faced Italian” (179). In spite of Buster’s “good Catholic” background that, according to Buster himself, means believing devoutly “in not judging a fellow man by background or nationality” we find that he is just as ready to exert prejudice as the next man (179). Buster’s cold response to the Italian youth’s protests initiates what is in one way an admirable collective wave of support for the boy, but in another way a bitter torrent of accusatory mistreatment of Buster. Unable to properly help out, because it is “against the union contract for a boss to touch a tool”, Buster is equally barred from explaining to his men that he is being “used as a guinea pig” (180). As the men rally against him, “furious at being cheated out of their relief and at the way the boy was being treated,” Buster’s hypocrisy shines through (187). Despite giving the young Italian man the most physically taxing job in the factory, and despite both Buster’s own admission that the job is tough and the other workers’ support for the doughy-faced fellow, Buster finds himself being infuriated with the, to Buster, disrespectful dress code and punk-like attitude of the man who works harder than anyone else (182). When the young Italian takes off, plotting his revenge on the factory by misplacing his final hooks just as he leaves, it is Buster who is forced to pick up his burden. Running ragged, being chastised by the other workers, feeling both “naked and exposed”, Buster finds himself in front of the engineering supervisors who have the audacity to criticize Buster for having “browbeat that kid”, and for being a “slave driver” (193, 195).

It is important to recognize that when Swados depicts a factory day where everything that can go wrong, goes wrong, and presents a protagonist whose inconsistent treatment of his workers clash with his self-professed role of “the best boss in the shop”, it is not the inconsistency of a single man that is being criticized (174). The inhumanity of the factory is

not a result of the factory itself, nor rampant consumerism, as responsibility for these broken ideals rests on the shoulders of the complicit men who support the hegemonic authority of those in charge. The disillusionment caused by patriarchal standards (standards that in turn pigeon hole men and makes them, like Orrin of “On the Line,” complicitly support the system that is causing their unhappiness), is showcased by the “promoted” Buster’s inability to break loose from the bonds that the micro society of the factory places on him. Keeping in mind Joe’s words of wisdom to Walter in “Joe, the Vanishing American”, the message rings clear: Neither of these men are automatons. The workers, foremen, bosses, and company “wheels” all have their ambitions, dreams, and desires, but they are complicit in creating and poisoning their immediate environment. As disaster strikes, every man is, in this narrative represented symbolically by Buster, left to stand or fall, rise or perish, alone, unless he takes responsibility for promoting solidarity between himself and his fellow men.

The other aspect of criticism towards patriarchal gender norms in “Just One of the Boys” come in the shape of the treatment Buster receives in what should by all accounts have been the sanctuary of his life: the private sphere of the home. Buster’s wife Agnes is presented as ambitious and, more importantly, oblivious to the challenges Buster faces at the factory. She is seemingly obsessed by their social status and the way it could potentially spell a middle-class future for their daughter Jeanine. In essence, such a sentiment is both understandable and noble, for who would not want the best for their children? In his presentation of the oblivious Agnes, we find Swados’ criticism, not necessarily of women’s gendered role, but of men’s inability to carve out a space of their own or to cohabitate as equals in the home. When Agnes smiles tolerantly and asserts that without her husband’s promotion they’d “never have bought this nice house in a nice community, with Jeanie having a chance to meet *refined* boys, and *get away from the riffraff*”, the intention is not, presumably, for Agnes to discredit the origins or associates of her husband (172, emphasis mine). It is rather a criticism of the responsibility Buster assumes when he infantilizes his wife: “After all these years, she still didn’t know the *facts of life*; it was lucky, he thought, that he’d taken her out of the beauty shop and insisted on her being a housewife” (172, emphasis mine).

Buster’s adherence to patriarchal gender roles that objectify and infantilize his wife does not stem from the opinions and perceptions of an immoral and uncaring person, but rather from the position of an ordinary man whose ignorance of such misogynistic attitudes

estranges the one ally Buster *should* have on his side against the inhumanity of his factory job. When Buster comes home from his worst day at work, bone weary and dispirited, he describes his wife in terms that display the emotional distance between them. Buster's resignation in the face of his wife's consumerist expectations leaves us with a protagonist who is a sad example of a man unable to overcome what he has internalized as "expectations", to be the breadwinner of the family, and the loneliness he experiences as he attempts to fulfill them.

Unable to come to terms with his troubles, and unable to communicate meaningfully with his wife the challenges he faces in his daily struggle to provide and be the breadwinner, Buster "turned up the water and splashed a bit so as not to have to answer", resorting to literally drowning out her ambitions (198). Perhaps, Swados seems to imply, life would be better for both Buster and Agnes, if the loneliness Buster faces in the public sphere of society was shared with his wife and the home that Agnes seeks to build could hold a place for Buster to be himself instead of a shadow of a stereotype he is unable to reconcile himself with.

### **"Back in the Saddle Again"**

When a story in a short story composite stands out from the rest of the collection, only being tangentially connected to the whole in its thematic world, through characters, setting, or location, the story is nominated by Rolf Lunden as a "fringe story" (Lundén 9). In essence, he explains that composites may contain stories that are "so poorly integrated that they do not seem to belong at all" (Lundén 125). In these cases, Lundén asserts, the fringe story may succumb to the critic's desire to achieve, and advocate, the homogeneity of the composite. As the critic searches for unity instead of respecting the fringe story's autonomy, he may force it "into submission by means of various, more or less ingenious attempts at thematic and/or structural integration" (Lundén 125). The examples Lundén puts forward as defining the fringe story are, among others, "The Revolutionist" and "My Old Man" from Hemingway's *In Our Time* (Lundén 135). In that sense, it is clear that "Back in the Saddle Again" is not a true fringe story as far as Lundén's arguments for complete separateness goes, but I would argue that he presents important arguments in favor of the fringe story that are compatible with the position "Back in the Saddle Again" holds in *On the Line*. We must avoid the temptation of ascribing "Back in the Saddle Again" the status of being representative of the whole of *On the Line*, both thematically and as the vessel of the one true intention of the author. The challenge, in other words, is to advocate the unique position of "Back in the

Saddle Again” and argue for the importance of its deviance from the thematic and moral criticism the author presented in the previous seven stories, while still allowing those seven stories to retain their structural and thematic importance.

“Back in the Saddle Again” presents, as implied in the title, a return to factory work for Frank the old timer, who was briefly introduced as a former co-worker of Buster the foreman in “Just one of the Boys”. The story deals with Frank, whose name is synonymous with what he becomes, frank, and his insecurities regarding his age, his previous experiences, and failures in the world of business, the loyal support of his wife May, the way he deals with the shame of returning to manual labor at his age, and the way the anti-union sentiments of Frank’s youth are at odds with the treatment he receives from the union today. In this story, with Frank as his focal point, we find Swados’ criticism of the patriarchal concept of gender complementary social roles, his support for solidarity between men, familiar and unfamiliar, and the importance of being able to swallow pride in the face of emotional estrangement to free oneself from the oppressive nature of stereotyped assumptions.

Close reading “Back in the Saddle Again”, the most glaring characteristic setting it apart from the other stories of *On the Line* is the depiction of Frank’s marriage to May being one of happy tenderness and mutual respect, rather than opposite halves not sharing the same subjective existence. Whereas Pop, Orrin, Harold, and Buster all share a life of apathy, incompatibility, estrangement, or a mutual communicative misunderstanding with their life partners, Frank and May appear to be two halves of a whole. This relationship is introduced as Frank looking at his wife, explains how she “still thinks of us as honeymooners” (199). May, as opposed to the other wives of the composite, shows a sense of understanding that goes beyond what Swados has allowed the other wives to display (200). The trust between husband and wife is further promoted in what becomes the crux of their relationship: Frank’s ability to include his wife in his personal concerns, and break through the veil separating the public and private spheres. He explains to her, in a display of both affection and respect that holds no precedent in *On the Line*, what he thinks, feels, and how he is unable to “gamble other people’s money on new business deals” (200).

Frank’s relationship to the rest of his family also comes across as different, both in nature, quality, and quantity, to relationships displayed by any other character in *On the Line*. It is true that Frank, as the only character with both sons and grandsons, as opposed to the other character’s daughters, is in a unique position to have a space carved out for him in the

domestic sphere. This does not take away from the nurture, love, and respect Frank shows for his family members though. Frank displays a level of nurture and care for his male descendants that put any previous father-son relationships in the composite to shame (203-204). Where Swados displays the distant and self-fulfilling prophecies of the emotionally reclusive husband that lives in fear of being misunderstood in most of the other relationships in *On the Line*, he allows Frank to experience a support and understanding that supports this thesis' critique of the masculine relationship in the previous stories. No other protagonist in *On the Line* could, based on the presentation of their perceptions and inability to deal with their insecurities, be described as "sitting companionably over [their wife's] crossword puzzle", or be referred to as "Lovebirds" by their son(s) (205).

Despite the security Frank draws upon from his loving and caring relationship to his wife, and to the rest of his family, we find that Frank is having trouble dealing with the shame of returning to factory work at the age of fifty-six. It is important to note that this shame is expressed solely from Frank's point of view. There are no explicit accusations of failure or unworthiness from the rest of the protagonist's family: "Ray had nothing to offer his father but sympathy – and even that, Frank knew, he dared not express but had instead to pretend that it meant nothing to him" (206). The reader is not given insight into the viewpoint or thought process of neither Ray, May, or any of the grandchildren, and it is therefore only through the descriptions and musings of Frank, accurate or not, that we must deduce meaning. There is no reason for us to consider there to be no value of truth in the way Frank describes the other characters' reactions to his return to the factory, but as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that Frank's perception of their shame is augmented by his own fears: What starts out as "his own family, even his little grandchildren, humiliated by his final entrapment in the dirty pit from which he had made his escape earlier" and "May was ashamed, but she was brave enough to face out their friends; she was anxious, those first few days, to know exactly how it was with him" turns into a realization that their concern was not for their own honor, but rather a concern for Frank's well being (208, 207).s

Exemplified by Frank's adolescent reaction of fear to his grandchild's youthful admiration, he goes through a transformation process as he realizes that being honest and straightforward leads to a better inner life than being constantly guilty of hiding himself, both emotionally and literally (219). This epiphany occurs as Frank admits to his grandson Donnie, who together with his fellow third graders at school were visiting the factory earlier one day,

that he, granddad, works “just like everybody else. I have to, in order to take care of Grandma and me, so we’ll have money for when we get old [...] I mean *real* old” (220). For the first time since coming back to the factory, Frank shows great strength of character, resolving “that he would hide from no one any more”, purging from himself the injurious sense of honor that has burdened all the other men in *On the Line* (220). Not only is Frank allowed to come to terms with the condition of his job, but he is also allowed to accept a reality that some of the other protagonists have been denied. Frank’s acceptance of the reality of his age, both in the sense of what has been, that he is no longer as strong as before, and in the sense of what will come, allows Frank to move outside the conventional fear of aging and physical impotence that for instance Orrin is unable to overcome. It is also important to note that this inward change is not, as other characters appear to fear, met with outward hostility. Hanging up on his grandson after admitting to being just a regular man, hard working and unexceptional, “His wife patted him as he passed. ‘So that’s how it goes,’ she said mildly”, causing Frank, at first, to defend his choice, but his wife’s comforting and short-hand reassurance leaves him “satisfied” (221).

Swados not only dispels the shame his protagonist feels relating to his physical age, he also allows Frank to come to terms with his societal and mental maturity. It is clear, from Frank’s nostalgic musings, both to himself and to his wife, that he was strongly anti-union in his youth. May’s vehement “You think it means nothing to me, what you went through with all those low-class people when they were organizing the union – those beatings, fights, cars being tipped over. I’ll never forget how you hated it” forces Frank to reply how “All that business is settled now,” with the added sentiment “[h]ow he wished he could believe what he was saying!” (204-205). However, as he experiences the factory first hand, he begrudgingly admits that “Maybe I should have made more allowances, back in the thirties, for what they were up against, trying to civilize the company” and “He felt funny about being a recipient of the benefits the union had won” (208). Through Frank’s conversations with other, younger workers, the reader is privy to how the atmosphere has changed from the apparently fearful days of his earlier “murderous years on the assembly line” (212). A complete reversal of his younger anti-union assumptions occurs when Frank, hiding from his grandson as explained above, runs into an old associate who now happens to be the local union’s plant committee man. Lou’s perception of Frank’s former anti-union tendencies is somewhat at odds with Frank’s own recollections up to this point in the story, but he invites Frank, as a “former



member in good standing” to get his union initiation fee refunded, vowing to “vouch” for him on account of how he “used to see [Frank] at the meetings” (218).

Frank’s fortunate encounter with Lou and Lou’s fond recollection of him from younger days also proves to be Frank’s salvation. Facing a lay-off together with a dozen other men, a younger worker questions Frank about his seniority, to which his negative response leaves Frank feeling “alone and naked” (224). Facing uncertainty and the potentially humiliating experience of not only being “kicked out and flung aside”, but having to explain it to his grandson, Frank finds himself saved by Lou, who not only chases away Frank’s nagging fears and doubts, advocating his seniority as a former worker, but also invites him into the good company of the social sphere of fellow union supporters at the “union picnic tomorrow” (227). When, the following day, Frank goes to the picnic together with his wife and grandchildren, he recognizes that “his own separateness from the other picnickers seemed unimportant as he watched Donnie’s face turn red and white with awful glee as he clutched the rail of his dodgem car”, promoting the protagonist’s realization that the “separateness” was a construct of his own imagination (229): “No one was ridiculing him, he realized at last – everyone was simply being friendly” (231).

The happy ending of “Back in the Saddle Again” is a result of the ways Swados allows the protagonist successfully to deal with issues that are significant not only Frank, but to all of the other men in *On the Line*. It is possible to argue that in order to dispel his own shame and realize that he is not alone, Frank is also forced to accept that his autonomy does not supersede that of the other men on the line, and further, it demands the protagonist’s assent to the world’s demands that every man (and woman) is a part of a continuous social relation. However, this seems also to be the strength of Swados’ criticism as he presents it in the previous seven stories. Frank’s strength of character is not deduced from the breadth of his shoulders, from his endurance in the face of strenuous physical exercise, or his stoic acceptance of, and reclusion from, a society that demands his reactions and opinions to fit a presupposed mold. Frank is, as previously mentioned, allowed to be frank. In accepting who he is, he also accepts his dependence on those around him, opening both mind and metaphorical arms to their embrace. Realizing that “everyone was simply being friendly”, he strolls hand in hand with his wife into the termination of the text through the “friendly throng toward the last little victory of the waning afternoon” (233).

# Conclusion

The problematic relationship between the male protagonists in Harvey Swados' *On the Line* provided a starting point for an enquiry into the male role, which has focused on the boundaries of masculinity in this mid-twentieth century American short story composite. Unhappiness permeates the text as homosocial alienation and the adherence to and inability to break away from strict gender normative stereotypes lock protagonists into presupposed emotional reactions to events as they unfold in the narrative. Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, it has become clear that there is a wealth of understanding and social criticism to be found in *On the Line*. My goal has not been to discredit previous readings of *On the Line* as a criticism of the dehumanizing aspects of the author's contemporary factory work place, but rather to expand the understanding of the author's presentation of male-to-male relationships to include oppressive patriarchal standards that go beyond the men-at-work relationship.

Descriptions of emotional apathy or self-protective delusions run parallel with the characters' social isolation, both in plot and presentation, as the author leaves the reader with little information about the protagonists' relations to their fellow workers beyond what is explicitly stated. This leaves the central characters isolated not only in the thematic sense of their individual stories, but also in the overarching structure of the composite. The central characters who figure in *On the Line* all feel the effects of, while at the same time acting oblivious to, the presupposed societal demands on them, and the dangers of adhering to them. They internalize oppressive characteristics and opinions that, if taken to an extreme, promote a society that defines itself by an "eye for an eye" type of masculinity, rather than one of confident solidarity. Most importantly, Swados criticizes the contemporary perception of the father as unable to emotionally connect with his daughters, leaving those characters without a meaningful or idealized father-son relationship without any emotional attachment to their home or family. Without allies at home, men stand alone in the face of an uncaring world and are even more susceptible to depression. This is particularly evident as the topics of loneliness, emotionally distant relations, and self deluding depression are juxtaposed in the final narrative of the composite. Frank's bravery and openness as he reconciles, successfully,

with the same challenges that the other men of *On the Line* face, leaves Swados criticism of their wrong approach emphasized and enhanced.

The masculinities movements of the last decades, as presented by Michael Kimmel, E. Anthony Rotundo, and Jørgen Lorentzen, may well find resonance in a collection of short vignettes on masculinity published half a century ago. In “The Day the Singer Fell,” Swados criticizes a sense of misplaced masculinity that dismisses black male manhood. The story is also a critique of the intolerance for individual preferences and dreams, as gender policing marginalizes effeminacy in favor of “fitting in” to society’s accepted normative models. In “Fawn, With a Bit of Green” contemporary consumerist masculinity is revealed to be a weakness and a source of continuous discomfort, as men attempt to shore up their perceived sense of manhood by materialistic accomplishments rather than experience or inner maturity. “Joe, the Vanishing American” reveals the hypocrisy of a society that demands masculine responses to masculine challenges, while at the same time being loath to imbue the next generation (or the inexperienced) with wisdom and intellectual autonomy, as well as the dangers of adolescent dependence. “A Present for the Boy”, in a vein similar to “Fawn, With a Bit of Green” criticizes the self deluding idolatry of materialistic masculinity, as well as the emotionally distant father-son relationship, and the sacrifice of the younger generation’s subjective reality to patriarchy’s expectations. “On the Line” criticizes presupposed expectations of the breadwinner stereotype, as well as gender complementarity, the dangers of perceiving oneself as unique and superior to others, and the dangers of complicity in supporting a system of oppression that also restricts oneself. “One for the Road” reveals a criticism of the importance of emotional attachments and the dangers of objectification in parent-child relationships, as well as the importance of swallowing shame and facing the tangibility of reality. “Just one of the Boys” is a treatise on the importance of male-to-male solidarity and empathy, as well as the importance of not subjecting oneself to the temptation of viewing other men as tools, or merely cogs in machinery that serves purely your own ends. Finally, “Back in the Saddle Again” approaches all of the above sentiments from the opposite direction, allowing its aging protagonist to come to terms with the aspects of manhood that have troubled all the other main characters.

The terms “masculinity” or “manhood” may hold troublesome connotations in a world where institutionalized misogyny outweighs and overshadows any notion of misandry, but that does not take away from Swados’ apt presentation of individual men’s struggles with

gender normative expectations. The presentation of masculinities and of “manhood” in this thesis only demonstrates a small part of a larger field of study: the presentation of men in literature, as well as the gender theory on male identity. Given the opportunity, it would be interesting to carry out similar close readings of other short story collections, both composites and non-composites, to widen the scope and understanding of men’s roles as agents and victims of patriarchal standards of masculinity. However, within the scope of this thesis, it has been clearly established that Harvey Swados presents, criticizes and deals with this motif expertly and repeatedly, throughout the course of his eight short stories.

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